

# The Awakening of a Gaming Addict

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For last 12 years, I have been trying to implement a computer game that would realize a place for me, and other like-minded individuals, where a certain kind of longing would be satisfied. Longing, that has been with me ever since I first played a game that was intriguing and immersive enough for causing me to lose the consciousness of time and of my immediate surroundings. A game that was still in my thoughts when I went to sleep, if I went to sleep at all. A game that would satiate the stomach better than food.

Dungeon Master, Civilization, The Settlers. Opponents after another lie defeated behind me. Nothing could match the sheer power of my thumb of clicking +5! These games kept me spell-bound until I realized how much intrigue it would add, if I could play against or with other players and that's when I found the MUDs<sup>1</sup>, the text-based MMORPGs<sup>2</sup> of the nineties.

Determined to get a valuable item with magical properties, I was playing with other no-lifers when I should have been sleeping. Running in to a lair of a treasure-wearing monster, defending, blasting and running out. "It screamed!", the mage would yell, with the others agreeing with excitement. The healers would then start to bandage the wounds, until everything's ready for a new round with the monster. This process would be repeated for hours, until the monster would finally die. And then, with luck in rolling dice, it would be my turn to get the item the monster was wearing. Or I would be back in the same lair during the next night.

The games that are based on a concept of predefined quests and lairs, must always end, when the content ends. The need for

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<sup>1</sup> Multi User Dungeon

<sup>2</sup> Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game

continuing the grind ends as soon as the players reach the last level of their potential to advance. This is when the gamers usually simply go find a next game and start the grind all over. But why couldn't the idea of massively multi-player games be taken a step higher to a stage where the game wouldn't be dependent on predefined content but the content would be created by the players themselves?

When comparing massively multi-player games to their single-player counterparts, the multi-player games inherently add something very intriguing on top of the predefined content and that's the players themselves. The players are diverse and each day will guaranteedly be different, unlike in the games where the players mainly interact with poor implementations of artificial intelligence.

This in itself is great, but could the game further be advanced by throwing out the predefined content and the last remnants of artificial intelligence, and let the game be fully controlled by the players themselves within a game system that would act as a simulator of a world?

As a hungry blacksmith, I'd yell "Someone sell me food!" and the food would come. Someone else would do the hunting because they are obviously better in hunting than a hungry blacksmith. Who, in exchange, would give money to the hunter so that the hunter could buy the produce of the blacksmith, that in turn might be useful in the hunting process.

In a game without content, the players essentially are without anything to do, until the game hits the player with a basic need to find food, water and shelter. Harder it is to satisfy the basic needs, the better. After the basics are well in place, people want to improve. The key is in finding one's place in the society, because upon that one's worth is based on. The grind is as tight as the competition is tight.

When the basic occupations are well covered, creative people will find opportunities for never-thought-of activities. And when that's not enough, people can always settle to new lands, start

anew and trade with the old friends, because every new region and every new settlement will always have something special.

People want to be unique, invaluable and powerful. That's what drive them to do things, even repetitive things. Predefined quests no longer need to drive the players, as long as the game system is able to give enough of basic building blocks for the players to build their own story. After a certain amount of basic building blocks and a little bit of fine tuning, the game could really start to fly and be independant ever after. Isn't that enough of a goal for a game developer?

The code name for this project has been "Majik". It's a kind of randomly chosen name, but in a certain sense it pictures the project, because it's the "Magic" of immersion the project has been after. Starting in 1995 the project employed countless enthusiasts and was featured in several magazines, and even in one TV show.

The project implemented prototype games with almost every conceivable type of representation from text-based oldskool interfaces to bells 6 whistles 3D including experimentation with countless game mechanisms and trials until the year of 2002, when our greatest, commercially supported development attempt suddenly failed to raise sufficient finances. On that sad day, we were left with nothing but our inextinguishable passion for Majik.

It's certainly a huge work to implement something like this and honestly I have been thinking if it really is worth it - is it something that we should try to achieve, after all? Sure, playing such a game could be extremely fun, but hey - all these fancy graphics, we already have them! Just by looking out of the window.

As a self-respecting coder, it hurts to program something that already exists, especially if there's a chance that my implementation never could beat it in excellence. My version could only have worse graphics and no practical way to give anything more than a force feedback gamepad as a way for approximating the sense of physical contact, not to speak of simulating our innate ability to enjoy the subtle cues given by our noses. And it is not even the plot that could beat the excellence of the real life, because

out there in the true realdom the basic plot is very similar, almost identical, with the wettest fantasies shared by the designers behind the initiative.

Why it is then, that we are drawn to build our dreams on the virtual worlds of never-perfect approximations of real life living? Yes, it may be that it is the dragons and magic missiles are the key of behind the attraction, but one could argue that no intriguing theme alone make an all-encompassing substitute for real life, but it is in the social dependency and the constant pressure to improve oneself or one's standing in the society. Crafting a tool, building a house, reading books, exchanging information. To me, it is starting to sound very similar to the basic day-to-day task that we do, or could do in real life.

And speaking of what we could do, we wouldn't need to limit ourselves to merely being content with our average daily routines, but we could seek to form communities, make tools and even build villages in a similar manner that we would do in these simulators of real life. Not only we could do that, but we could also seek to reach and go beyond of the time-stopping Magic attainable in the virtual environments. Because it certainly can't be true that these virtual worlds would give more or even equally satiating content than the life itself. Each of us certainly have glimpses of this magic in real life circumstances, especially if we start to recall our childhood. Knowing that it is possible, it also must be possible to recreate and even sustain this magic by determinedly altering the ways of our being and doing, for creating the ultimate game of Real Life Majik.