Game Communities

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Posted on September 1, 2004 by Editor

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Author Bio

My coworkers and I often take breaks from our daily routine to play games together. We play a networked video game called Soldat [1] about three times a week. Though all of us are video game developers and play a wide variety of video games on our own, Soldat is special because it allows us to participate in a game as a group. We laugh when somebody pulls off a particularly spectacular move, curse when we lose by a tiny margin, and congratulate each other on skillful plays. For the half hour we typically play, Soldat offers a focused and enjoyable group experience.

Group interaction is the theme of a lot of video games today. Networked games in particular have been growing in popularity ever since broadband began to become readily available across the country. Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (often clumsily abbreviated to “MMORPGs”) like Sony’s Everquest [2] offer game worlds that can be shared among thousands of players simultaneously. Multiplayer games are appealing to many game designers because they facilitate group interaction much like traditional board games. Instead of providing the player with linear, storybook-like adventures, games that revolve around multiple players are often open-ended playgrounds.

Group interaction in games is not a new idea. Most early electronic games were developed for arcade machines, stand-alone pay-per-play game systems that were stationed in bars, restaurants, and other public places. Arcade games that capitalized on multiple players became quite popular in the early 1980s, and many people who grew up during the arcade era still have fond memories of playing games like Williams’ 1982 hit Joust [3] with their friends.

But in 1986, the Nintendo of America Corporation released the Nintendo Entertainment System (often referred to as the NES) and changed the face of the game industry. The NES was a game system for the home that plugged into a television set, and though it came with two controllers, most NES games were designed for a single player. While many arcade games gave the player goals such as “conquer all the other players,” or “attain the highest score,” games of the NES era commonly required the player to “solve the puzzle,” “unravel the mystery,” or “beat the
As a result, the video game experience became much more solitary. Rather than facilitate interaction between people, many game designers strove to create linear, single-player adventures. Nintendo’s 1986 hit *Super Mario Bros.* is prototypical of the era; rather than providing a single, unchanging playground like *Joust*, *Super Mario Bros.* is comprised of 36 stages that must be completed in sequence, each with its own visual and contextual motifs. The result, while compelling, was unapologetically designed with a single player in mind; the goal of *Super Mario Bros.* is not to beat an opponent, but to successfully maneuver the protagonist to the end of the game. If early video games filled the role of a referee between human opponents, games in NES era became opponents themselves.

The focus on single player experiences continues to this day. The trend has been so strong that public arcades have all but vanished. But with the rise of the Internet, many game developers are again turning to games that focus on group interaction, this time utilizing computer networks rather than public places to connect players. The computer game industry in particular has embraced multiplayer games, and network-only games like *Soldat* are quickly becoming the norm.

However, the anonymity of the Internet poses new problems for game developers. Since network games are typically played using pseudonyms, the true identity of each player is usually hidden from the other participants. Many players see anonymity as freedom from reprisal and responsibility, and thus behave in ways that ruin the game experience for others. It is quite difficult to play an online game for any length of time without being verbally attacked by malicious players. Cheating is a constant problem, as are con artists who scam other players out of virtual money in games that support a simulated economy.

There are other, more fundamental problems with network-based multiplayer games. In his article *Not Yet, you Fools!*, Richard A. Bartle attacks the notion that voice communication, a technology that is beginning to take root in the network game industry, might be applicable to MMORPGs.

> “Adding reality to a virtual world robs it of what makes it compelling – it takes away that which is different between virtual worlds and the real world: the fact that [the participants of the game] are not the real world. Voice is reality.” [4]

Bartle’s point is that voice communication technology might ultimately damage an online game’s suspension of disbelief, and that without immersion, an online game is reduced to a medium rather than an experience. Developers of networked games are still trying to strike a balance between unrestricted group interaction and immersion while attempting to keep their players civil. So far there seems to be no easy solution.

However, some innovative game developers have found a way out of the network multiplayer
quagmire. Rather than try to facilitate communities through game technology, some designers are choosing to instead invent their communities from scratch. Games like Maxis' *The Sims* play much like any multiplayer game, except that all the other “players” are controlled by software. Rather than share a playground with a human participant, *The Sims* provides the player with a playground populated by human-like virtual participants called “agents.” Each agent looks like a person and attempts to conform to human emotions and needs; if you force your agents to work too hard, for example, they will complain about their lack of social life. When an agent’s bladder becomes full, he or she will try to make it to visit the nearest restroom as quickly as they can. The more convincing the agents manage to be, the more the player feels like he is interacting with other real people. However, agents in *The Sims* do not simulate the flaws common to real world gamers: they never talk out of character, try to con you out of virtual dough, or call your momma fat. Maxis has attempted to create a game that fools the player into believing that he is participating with other well-behaved humans.

Nintendo’s *Animal Crossing* takes this concept a step further. Like *The Sims*, *Animal Crossing* attempts to build a community of convincing, human-like characters. While the inhabitants of *The Sims* are convincing because they have a wide range of human behaviors, the agents in *Animal Crossing* succeed because they are highly articulate. If you strike up a conversation with an animal, you can learn their opinions, influence their mood, and even affect the way they speak. Individual animals have distinct personalities, and these traits influence how they respond to the presence of the protagonist. *Animal Crossing* allows the player to write letters to specific animal agents, and the agents are able to write responses. The developers have tried very hard to create the illusion of a living, breathing animal community to participate with the player. They are trying to build into their virtual world the feeling that playing *Animal Crossing* is akin to interacting with a group of real human beings.

For my coworkers and I, a few rounds of *Soldat* is an excellent way to blow off some steam and relax. Since we keep our games restricted to our office network, the group experience is untainted by malicious players hiding behind anonymity. Multiplayer games that focus on the interaction between a group of people are a special form of entertainment, a wholly different experience from games that follow the linear *Super Mario Bros.* format. But I often do not feel that I have the strength to ignore the inevitable onslaught of misspelled slurs and “yo momma” jokes that come with most games that are accessible by anyone with an Internet connection. I am increasingly likely to look for my group entertainment among fake people—software facsimiles of humans that will not boast about the obvious virtues of one computer operating system versus another. Though the games that provide such virtual communities are still quite primitive, I am often more willing to play with companions that have brain-dead software routines than with offensive and deceitful humans.

As technology improves, game developers who attempt to duplicate the experience of multiplayer games in single-player worlds may strike gold. Unless games that rely on anonymous participants over a network are able to improve the experience of dealing with other players, many more may turn to games that provide communities that are not hampered by real people.
Footnotes:


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34 THOUGHTS ON “GAME COMMUNITIES”

Vanessa

on January 30, 2014 at 4:34 AM said:

For hottest information you have to pay a quick visit the web and on the web I found this site as a best website for most up-to-date updates.

marketing business plan

on January 30, 2014 at 7:34 AM said:

Hey There. I found your blog using msn. This is a very well written article. I’ll make sure to bookmark it and return to read more of your useful info. Thanks for the post. I will certainly comeback.
Thanks for one’s marvelous posting! I truly enjoyed reading it, you’re a great author. I will remember to bookmark your blog and definitely will come back at some point. I want to encourage you continue your great posts, have a nice evening!

I like what you guys are up too. This type of clever work and exposure!

Keep up the good works guys I’ve included you guys to my blogroll.

Good way of explaining, and nice paragraph to obtain information on the topic of my presentation focus, which i am going to convey in university.

great points altogether, you just received a emblem new reader.

What would you recommend in regards to your put up that you made some days ago? Any sure?
affiliate online marketing
on January 30, 2014 at 6:58 PM said:

Wow, awesome weblog format! How long have you been blogging for? you made running a blog look easy.
The full glance of your website is magnificent, let alone the content material!

help desk software solutions property investment loan delaware business incorporation agency auto insurance break down services rehabilitation alcohol mississippi criminal lawyer cheapest business insurance no closing refinance access database web hosting
on January 30, 2014 at 7:34 PM said:

Ahaa, its pleasant dialogue regarding this post at this place at this blog, I have read all that,
so at this time me also commenting here.

make money homesteading
on January 30, 2014 at 8:36 PM said:

What’s up it’s me, I am also visiting this web page regularly, this website is genuinely pleasant and the people are truly sharing fastidious thoughts.

money master
on January 30, 2014 at 8:56 PM said:

I don’t know if it’s just me or if everyone else experiencing issues with your blog. It looks like some of the written text within your posts are running off the screen.

Can someone else please provide feedback and let me know if this is happening to them as well? This may be a problem with my web browser because I’ve had this happen previously.
Thank you

ways to make quick money
on January 31, 2014 at 12:25 AM said:

Thanks for the good writeup. It in fact was once a entertainment account it.

Glance advanced to more introduced agreeable from you!
However, how can we be in contact?

Carin
on January 31, 2014 at 5:17 AM said:

I know this web site provides quality depending articles or reviews and extra stuff, is there any other web site which presents these kinds of things in quality?

signals kit shop
on January 31, 2014 at 7:20 AM said:

What’s up, this weekend is pleasant designed for me, as this point in time i am reading this fantastic educational post here at my home.

building a computer list of parts
on January 31, 2014 at 7:49 AM said:

My brother recommended I might like this blog. He was totally right. This post actually made my day.

You can not imagine just how much time I had spent for this information! Thanks!
online jobs easy

on February 1, 2014 at 2:34 PM said:

Now I am going to do my breakfast, when having my breakfast coming yet again to read further news.

Karin

on February 1, 2014 at 3:13 PM said:

I’m really enjoying the theme/design of your blog. Do you ever run into any web browser compatibility issues? A small number of my blog visitors have complained about my site not working correctly in Explorer but looks great in Opera. Do you have any suggestions to help fix this issue?

mobile games

on February 1, 2014 at 7:12 PM said:

For hottest information you have to pay a visit the web and on web I found this web page as a finest web site for most recent updates.

social media zones

on February 1, 2014 at 11:57 PM said:

whoah this weblog is excellent i like reading your articles. Stay up the good work! You realize, a lot of individuals are hunting around for this information, you could aid them greatly.
tax return
on February 2, 2014 at 7:57 AM said:

I’m gone to convey my little brother, that he should also
visit this web site on regular basis to get updated from most up-to-date news.

Meagan
on February 2, 2014 at 11:18 AM said:

I loved as much as you will receive carried out right here.

The sketch is tasteful, your authored subject matter
stylish. nonetheless, you command get bought an nervousness over that
you wish be delivering the following. unwell unquestionably come further formerly
again as exactly the same nearly very often inside case you shield this increase.

Rowena
on February 3, 2014 at 1:25 PM said:

I am really grateful to the holder of this site who has
shared this wonderful piece of writing at
at this time.

Jerold
on February 4, 2014 at 3:15 AM said:

First of all I would like to say superb blog!
I had a quick question in which I’d like to ask if you don’t mind.
I was curious to know how you center yourself and clear your thoughts
prior to writing. I have had difficulty clearing my mind in
getting my thoughts out there. I truly do enjoy writing however it just seems like the
first 10 to 15 minutes tend to be wasted just
trying to figure out how to begin. Any suggestions or hints?
Kudos!
u.s. gold bureau
on February 4, 2014 at 8:19 AM said:

Hi there to every one, the contents present at this web site are really remarkable for people knowledge, well, keep up the good work fellows.

time jobs
on February 4, 2014 at 12:55 PM said:

Fantastic beat ! I would like to apprentice while you amend your website, how can i subscribe for a blog website? The account helped me a acceptable deal. I had been a little bit acquainted of this your broadcast offered bright clear idea

Janice
on February 4, 2014 at 1:12 PM said:

Hey I know this is off topic but I was wondering if you knew of any widgets I could add to my blog that automatically tweet my newest twitter updates.

I’ve been looking for a plug-in like this for quite some time and was hoping maybe you would have some experience with something like this. Please let me know if you run into anything.

I truly enjoy reading your blog and I look forward to your new updates.

Andreas
on February 4, 2014 at 2:38 PM said:

naturally like your web site but you have to check the spelling on
quite a few of your posts. Several of them are rife with spelling issues and I to find it very bothersome to inform the truth nevertheless I’ll definitely come back again.

marketing vocabulary
on February 4, 2014 at 6:34 PM said:

I’m gone to tell my little brother, that he should also visit this website on regular basis to get updated from most up-to-date gossip.

Minna
on February 4, 2014 at 8:24 PM said:

Spot on with this write-up, I honestly think this amazing site needs a lot more attention. I’ll probably be back again to read more, thanks for the info!

crm hosted federal student consolidation refinance your auto loan electric powered wheelchairs top ten web host medical negligence lawyers home insurance com harrison auto drug addiction treatment programs buy online auto insurance recover crashed hard dr
on February 5, 2014 at 3:10 AM said:

I am now not positive where you are getting your info, however good topic.

I needs to spend some time finding out much more or understanding more.
Thank you for great info I was looking for this information for my mission.

Lucienne
on February 5, 2014 at 4:02 AM said:
Yesterday, while I was at work, my sister stole my apple ipad and tested to see if it can survive a 25 foot drop, just so she can be a youtube sensation.

My apple ipad is now destroyed and she has 83 views. 
I know this is completely off topic but I had to share it with someone!

money in spanish

on February 5, 2014 at 4:27 AM said:

Great article.

Tresa

on February 5, 2014 at 4:43 AM said:

Hi there, I found your blog by the use of Google while looking for a related subject, your web site came up, it seems to be great. I've bookmarked it in my google bookmarks.

Hi there, simply turned into aware of your blog via Google, and found that it is really informative. I am going to watch out for brussels.

I'Il be grateful for those who proceed this in future.
A lot of other folks shall be benefited out of your writing. Cheers!

Alva

on February 5, 2014 at 7:59 AM said:

Since the admin of this web page is working, no uncertainty very soon it will be well-known, due to its quality contents.
mobile marketing software on February 5, 2014 at 11:27 AM said:

Hi there great blog! Does running a blog such as this take a lot of work? I’ve very little understanding of coding but I was hoping to start my own blog soon. Anyhow, if you have any recommendations or tips for new blog owners please share.

I know this is off topic but I simply wanted to ask.

Cheers!