

Class Effect

ENGL 398E

February 26, 2014

Group Proposal

Our project is to create a scavenger hunt on the TAG Minecraft server. The idea is that players from other groups will find the clues for our scavenger hunt and try to complete it for an alternate gameplay experience within the game of Minecraft itself.

We understand Minecraft as a game with very soft rails. The “sandbox” format allows for players to engage in various sorts of game play, including but not limited to the “beat the boss” experience, the control of resources and construction of an empire, or the creation of architecture and sculptures of interest. We wanted to offer a more hard-rail experience by creating a linear gameplay mode via a scavenger hunt.

Early on in our experimentation with building on the server we found that our basic needs were fulfilled very quickly. Following Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, we ensured survival, secured renewable resources (biological/physiological), then we finished our castle and made it home for all our team members (love/belonging), and even acquired esteem outside the server, when our castle was mentioned in class and our builders lauded. In the ensuing weeks we became more powerful, efficient, and we're now self-sufficient. We are at the top of the pyramid: what can we do now that we have everything? How do we stand out? Becoming rich, powerful or self-sufficient can be done by anyone. Our scavenger hunt is a new way to interact with the world on our own terms. It is a way for us to stand out, to do something that is not within the obvious, immediate scope of the game "surviving, building, farming, mining, crafting.” As a group this could be interpreted as our attempt at self-actualization.

In a sense we are crafting, but more creatively, in a way that is closer to Bogost's notion of "carpentry." With the scavenger hunt we hope to observe how other players interact with and within the game. As it has been demonstrated before, video games can be used as a pedagogic tool. In a way we are setting up an experiment. Ultimately, our group project revolves more around the type of interactions the other groups will engage in when confronted with the hunt rather than the hunt in itself. What would it mean if nobody gets to the end? Perhaps only a handful of players will take on our challenge. Will someone cheat to get to the end? We can only guess what will happen on the server until we officially launch the scavenger hunt.

Minecraft is an exploratory space that can be almost entirely modified to the gamer's will. A consequence of this type of gaming design is the complete or partial loss of the game play found in traditional, more linear video games. We hope to use the tropes found in other video games, which our classmates will be used to as affordances that will help them complete the hunt. More specifically, we will use visual clues like light and arrows—commonly understood symbols—to draw players to checkpoints along the scavenger hunt. The most obvious example is that our checkpoints will be chests, since it is customary in role-playing video games for the player to find goodies in chests. Within the chests will be textual clues written on paper in riddle format that will lead the player to the next clue. There will be between five and seven chests in total. Furthermore, a hunt requires a certain level of spatial comprehension. Light is often used to indicate to the player where she or he should be heading next. In Minecraft, the circadian cycle with the rising and the setting of the sun will impose a challenge, since the "scavenger" will become vulnerable to mobs at night outside their base.

Already we have noticed that as "designers" we are imposing hard rails and require more constraints, specifically establishing cardinal directions and using them to describe where

landmarks are to the rest of the group. We are organizing the space on our own terms, according to our needs. This goes back to the lack of maps in the Minecraft world. It forces the users to develop alternative methods to get around. The construction of the hunt itself will require us to use coordinates and landmarks to locate relatively isolated parts of the server to place our chests and take note of their locations. There is also a desire to make the scavenger hunt more challenging by not merely placing chests in easy to access areas. So far, one of them is located inside a volcano-like construction filled with lava, and the other in a hut underwater.

As students most work of our work is done alone, with books and an Internet connection. The process we are currently engaging is much more collaborative and requires more communication between ourselves to make progress and complete tasks. The pedagogical framework is different from other classes and therefore the types of thing we will learn will be different. This goes back to the formation of knowledge being an on going and shared experience. Obviously this construction exercise in Minecraft, had it been done individually, would have given a more simplistic end result and limited our understanding of the game's boundaries. As a group, we can push our ideas further, get more done, as well as feed off each other's creativity to solve issues that have and will come up.

Some of the questions we have asked ourselves are:

- How satisfying an experience can it be to “win” the scavenger hunt? Will it be as unfulfilling as the Ender Dragon? Or is this more about our game experience building it — who is getting the better gameplay experience, the “crafters” or the “scavengers”?
- Is equal division of labour possible between 11 people? Can we achieve the goal we created from the start without it mutating into something different?

- Should we try to make the scavenger hunt less challenging to give the chance to more players to finish it, or rather see it as a way to test their logical and technical abilities?
- Is it even possible to create a linear gameplay experience in a game built with soft rails?

We are attempting to consider other players' game play experiences above our own. Typically, consumers do not consider other players over themselves. We are effectively flipping this around and becoming the producer or designer. We are reflecting back on Jenkins and Squire's argument about video games being social spaces. Minecraft is deeply embedded in "virtual communities," where users share online their creations and exchange tips. Additionally, by creating a game based on spatial modifications, the "designers" are breaking down the wall between them and the users. With our project, we are testing the limits of this freedom.

Role Descriptions

- **Project Manager:** Responsible for sending emails to the group and keeping everyone updated on where we are at with our goals and what still needs to be accomplished. Assures that team members are sticking to their assigned roles or adapts them accordingly.

- **Documentarist:** Divided into three subsections: in-game documentation (screenshots, videos), out-of-game documentation (progress of group work, meeting minutes), and organization of documentation.
 - **In-game documentarist** - Records progress of construction, changes in landscape, progress of scavenger hunt. This person needs to be like a person taking pictures a party, whether something exciting is happening or not, because often we do not know that something is/was important until another related event has taken place—kind of like recording the cause before the effect.
 - **Out-of-game documentarist** - Records progression of what is actually done by members of the group. Makes note of discussions and goals for reference as the project evolves.
 - **Organizer** - Keeping documents chronologically ordered. A lot of information is coming in from all sides and this person needs to keep track of What and When.

- **Researcher:** Responsible for making gameplay smooth for the builders. If a certain item is needed in large quantities this person will do research to find the most efficient way to get that item, for example. This person will also search for other scavenger hunt-type games that other people may have already built in Minecraft.

- Builder: Divided into four subsections: castle construction, management of resources, designing the hunt, construction of the hunt.
 - Castle construction - Setting up a permanent, livable, safe home base.
 - Management of resources - Responsible for maintaining a sufficient level of resources for construction. Including but not limited to mining, farming, husbandry.
 - Design of the hunt - Evaluating the landscape and doing creative work that determines where and how the hunt will function.
 - Construction of the hunt - Building the actual clues and testing them.

- Ambassador: People-person responsible for communicating with other groups and helping out or asking for help as needed. Will also ask other players to play beta versions of the hunt to see if it makes sense to “total” outsiders.

- Presenter: Responsible for making our vision understandable to other classmates. Must summarize the project, name failures and successes, and compress documentation. Will be done in a Powerpoint.

Class Effect Constitution

We the people of Class Effect, in order to create an excellent project, establish Justice, Peace, and Crafting in order to secure the blessings of Liberty and Ludology for ourselves and other groups, do ordain and establish this Constitution as lawful and right.

Article I

Consensus and Disagreements

Section I

Every group member has a valid and equal voice. Decisions will be made by consensus. If there is disagreement everyone will have the opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns.

Disagreements will be worked out through conversation and discussion until consensus is achieved.

Section II

Every group member will be considered equal, both in-game and out of game, across all divisions of labour and positions.

Article II

Peacekeeping and Property

Section I

All members of Class Effect shall treat all members of other groups with respect.

Section II

Peace between groups will be upheld by ensuring all actions by members of Class Effect are made with respect to these ideals:

- a) We shall actively work towards harmony on the server.
- b) We shall treat the spaces and objects of the other groups with respect.

Section III

- a) We shall consider our space and objects as belonging to Class Effect members only.
- b) We shall consider our space as open and inviting as long as it is treated with respect.
- c) We will take necessary action/precautions if we feel our space is not being treated with respect.