

Michael Agnich

## Sojourn

Considering what game to choose for this review was difficult for me. For a while I thought about some of the key RPG's in game history, The Bard's Tale, Zork, and Ultima crossed my mind. But today I am most interested in the online games, especially the massively multiplayer online games such as Everquest. I then decided on Sojourn MUD because it may be my favorite game of all time and its implications on gaming today are easy to show.

Sojourn MUD opened its doors in 1993 and very quickly became very popular. What you must understand about Sojourn and about MUDs in general is that they were completely different from typical linear games. There is no end to the game. Players compete to obtain the best reputations and the best equipment. The other major facet of MUDs is that they are completely text based. One might see this as a limitation, and in certain aspects it is, but in other ways it is a huge advantage. Any computer system could play for free with nothing more than a telnet client. Text also allowed updates and new code to be introduced on almost a weekly basis. For this reason, Sojourn is still alive today and enjoys a huge following (in MUD terms) with over 150 people logged on at peak times. The code driving the game was nothing short of amazing. To bring the game some aspect of graphics, ANSI color was used in a fashion that truly brought life to the text. The creatures in the game were coded with such intelligence that certain areas in the MUD require over 30 people over 6 hours to complete. At the time, the challenge of

Sojourn was on par with or greater than any game on the open market and this was a large part of its success and fun.

Gameplay on MUDs in general is difficult to explain at best. Gameplay on Sojourn is another thing entirely. At the end of this document I will post some logs of actual gameplay so that you might understand what Sojourn looks like. When you log onto the game for the first time, you create a character. This character can be one of 12 races and 13 classes, all with unique abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. There are also two categories of races, one evil and one good. Trolls, Ogres, Duergar, Drow, and Illithids are considered evil and Humans, Elves, Dwarves, Halflings, Half-Elves, Gnomes, and Barbarians are considered the good races. There was also a section of players known as outcast that were good race but played one of the two evil classes, necromancer and anti-paladin. These characters can have no interaction with the good races but are still not allowed in evil cities, making their lives very difficult.

After character creation, your player enters the world at his/her designated hometown. This is when the actual game begins. The object of Sojourn, if such a thing exists, is to level up in order to make your character more powerful up to a maximum of level 50. Levels are obtained by earning experience by killing monsters in the game. This is where it becomes difficult. Sojourn was designed as a MUD for veterans and nothing is easy to kill. In order to achieve positive results, one must combine forces with characters of different classes. For example, a warrior class cannot do well without a cleric, shaman, or druid to heal him, and in return a healing class cannot survive or do the damage necessary to defeat the monsters. This is what makes Sojourn so unique. Many MUDs were designed to allow people to advance alone, Sojourn made that impossible by

designing truly smart creatures and making their difficulty such that no one can achieve success without the help of others.

The most innovative part of MUDs is the social atmosphere that they foster. There are hierarchies of players and on top of them are the “Gods” who do the actual coding and revisions to the game. The types of characters on Sojourn could be divided into three groups. First are the die-hard gamers whose sole objective is to get to level 50 and then achieve the best equipment possible. This group is usually an old hat from the game and derives fun from completing objectives never before done and pushing the edges of the game as far as possible. The second group consists of role-players. This group is mostly concerned with playing their characters as they picture them in the game. This type of player will usually level when he/she sees fit and derives fun from immersing him or herself into the atmosphere. The third group consists of chatters. This group of people uses the game as a chat engine and to meet friends. Usually never levels much at all but at the same time will be most helpful to those completely new to the game.

For the more difficult areas or “zones” in the game, many people are needed of all different types of classes. The combination of abilities of the different classes is needed to succeed at the harder aspects of the game. Certain people get accustomed to playing with certain other people as they get to know each other and the next step is to form an association known as a guild. These guilds, once formed, spend their time together and this creates a power struggle between these groups. There is also a struggle between the good races and the evil races, but they are never permitted to actually fight each other. One group is superior to another if they can complete a certain challenge faster or with

fewer people or simply do more of the challenges to obtain more equipment and thus make their players more powerful.

The game is thus not only powered by the code, but also by the interaction and the competition between the players. This is what makes the game unique. Unlike other multiplayer games, the competition is not direct head to head combat, but instead the competition is more complex and all your actions have repercussions because the player base is small enough that everyone knows everyone. If someone is generally uncooperative or just mean, everyone will know that is the case and the problem will take care of itself through player interaction. This makes the atmosphere much more pleasant because unlike most online games, the attitude of “I can do whatever I want because no one knows me” does not apply. This is a problem that persists in many games today without an adequate solution.

Now, we get to the real kicker. How does a game like Sojourn affect the greater world of gaming? Well in this case I have a very clear answer. Back in 1995, I met a character on Sojourn by the name of Aradune. His real name is Brad McQuaid and he had played since Sojourn opened and was generally considered one of the best players. More recently, Brad has become one of the lead developers in the massively multiplayer online role-playing game, Everquest. The similarities are staggering. The races are exactly the same. The classes are exactly the same. Even much of the equipment is from Sojourn. There is no doubt that Everquest is heavily based on Sojourn, Brad will freely admit that.

Now some might say the obvious progression of a game like Sojourn would be a graphical version like Everquest. Maybe so, but Sojourn will always hold advantages

over such an adaptation. The lack of graphics actually increases the pace of the game and allows a more diverse crowd to interact. On top of that is the fact that text MUDs will always be free and graphical versions (for now) are pay to play.

The code in Sojourn is on par with anything in the open gaming industry. In my opinion, nearly 9 years of constant additions and upgrades have made the game smarter, more difficult, and more immersive than anything yet created. In certain ways, the lack of technology in terms of graphics adds to the game as a whole and I will continue to try new games as they come out, but I, and many others, will always play Sojourn. Perhaps this alone is the reason it was so innovative.

I am trying to keep these logs small:

1. The end of a large fight that didn't end so well. For reference what I am posting

here took about 4 seconds total.

< 63h/694H 181p/181P 104v/104V >

<>

Jhorr barely slashes a high priest.

Jhorr barely slashes a high priest.

A high priest dodges an elemental rock python's attack.

A dark shadow starts casting an offensive spell.

Lazzraxxuum barely pounds a high priest.

The vampire of a frost giant mage parries the zombie of a high priest's lunge at it.

The vampire of a frost giant mage hits the zombie of a high priest very hard.

The vampire of a frost giant mage hits the zombie of a high priest hard.

The wraith of the butcher hits the zombie of a high priest.

The wraith of the butcher hits the zombie of a high priest hard.

A high priest hits Gurzog extremely hard.

A high priest hits Gurzog extremely hard.

A high priest starts casting an offensive spell.

Gurgn barely slashes a high priest.

Gurgn barely slashes a high priest.

Gurzog barely slashes a high priest.

Gurzog barely slashes a high priest.

A glimmer of insanity crosses Pheten's face as Black Longsword of Destruction's blade starts glowing with a strong magenta sheen.

Pheten slashes a high priest.

Lazzraxxuum panics, and attempts to flee.

Lazzraxxuum skulks south.

< 63h/694H 181p/181P 104v/104V >

<>

The vampire of a frost giant mage sends the zombie of a high priest sprawling with a powerful bash.

Gurgn futilely tries to rescue Gurzog!

< 63h/694H 181p/181P 104v/104V >

<> A high priest completes his spell...

A high priest utters the words, 'qlqraiz'

A high priest's cyclone tears at Jhorr, whose swings contact only air!

A high priest's cyclone tears and pummels the wraith of the butcher until the wraith of the butcher's lifeless body collapses.

The wraith of the butcher is dead! R.I.P.

Your blood freezes as you hear the rattling death cry of the wraith of the butcher.

The wraith of the butcher stops following you.

A dark shadow stops chanting abruptly!

The vampire of a frost giant mage slumps to the ground.

A high priest's cyclone tears and pummels the vampire of a frost giant mage until the vampire of a frost giant mage's lifeless body collapses.

The vampire of a frost giant mage is dead! R.I.P.

Your blood freezes as you hear the rattling death cry of the vampire of a frost giant mage.  
The vampire of a frost giant mage stops following you.  
A high priest's cyclone has proven too much for your now soft and pulpy body.  
With a final blow, you feel yourself falling to the ground.  
Your soul leaves your body in the cold sleep of death...  
You lose a level!  
You are no longer attractive to pigeons.  
Invisible things vanish again.  
gsay DI out

## 2. The end of a large quest in Sojourn

< 563h/654H 156p/156P 167v/174V >

<> vis 0

You snap into visibility.

< 564h/654H 156p/156P 169v/174V >

<> give hourglass lich

You give a blue steel hourglass filled with black sand to the Demi-Lich

< 564h/654H 156p/156P 171v/174V >

<> give dagger lich

You give a dagger of oblivion to the Demi-Lich

< 565h/654H 156p/156P 172v/174V >

<> say immortality

With a voice as cold as ice, the figure whispers into your ear  
'Immortality is what you seek, Immortality is what you shall have. You are a fool and will curse this day for all eternity, but you have proven yourself resourceful, evil, and ruthless. Henceforth all will despise you on sight and run from you in terror. Children will have nightmares about you, and armed men will hunt you down in your places of hiding. Your flesh will rot from your bones, and only undead creatures will be comfortable in your horrid presence.'

'Most importantly you will lose your soul and all semblances of mercy, charity, joy, pleasure, and the ability to love. May the dark gods laugh at your plight, and may you ever recall this day with terror.'

The demi-lich rises high above you and plunges the dagger into your breast. He holds you tightly with an ethereal hand and twists the dagger deeper into your chest as you feel all heat draining from your body in a rush. A horrid sound assails your ears, and you finally realize it is your own screaming as you begin to slowly die. Your last mortal image is that of a dark shadow laughing in derision as your vision tunnels to nothingness.

You awake to the sensation of your flesh melting off of your torso and limbs, and your eyes falling out of your head. Your armor and clothing shifts and a foul stench fills what is left of your nostrils. Your vision begins to return with a dim purple glow, and you feel a new strength filling the remains of your body. You feel a sudden overwhelming sense of loss and

realize that you are now a lich, damned to immortality and misery...

< 567h/640H 156p/180P 174v/155V >

With a voice as cold as ice, the figure whispers into your ear 'Immortality cast 'ice storm' what you seek, Immortality is what you shall have. You are a fool and will curse this day for all eternity, but you have proven yourself resourceful, evil, and ruthless. Henceforth all will despise you on sight and run from you in terror. Children will have nightmares about you, and armed men will hunt you down in your places of hiding. Your flesh will rot from your bones, and only undead creatures will be comfortable in your horrid presence.'

'Most importantly you will lose your soul and all semblances of mercy, charity, joy, pleasure, and the ability to love. May the dark gods laugh at your plight, and may you ever recall this day with terror.'

The demi-lich rises high above you and plunges the dagger into your breast. He holds you tightly with an ethereal hand and twists the dagger deeper into your chest as you feel all heat draining from your body in a rush. A horrid sound assails your ears, and you finally realize it is your own screaming as you begin to slowly die. Your last mortal image is that of a dark shadow laughing in derision as your vision tunnels to nothingness.

You awake to the sensation of your flesh melting off of your torso and limbs, and your eyes falling out of your head. Your armor and clothing shifts and a foul stench fills what is left of your nostrils. Your vision begins to return with a dim purple glow, and you feel a new strength filling the remains of your body. You feel a sudden overwhelming sense of loss and realize that you are now a lich, damned to immortality and misery...