

From sda Wed Nov 5 08:23:16 1986
Received: from kessel by moth; 05 NOV 86 08:23:16 PST
From: sda (Steve Arnold - Games Division)
To: aric, chip, farmer, nancy
Received: by kessel; 05 NOV 86 08:23:11 PST
Subject: Habitat meetings at Quantum, 11/3
Status: R

Here is a summary of our conversations:

1. In addition to the elevator, we need to specify other objects that will be part of the field update test. What else will be installed and/or deleted?
2. Quantum does not want to buy a C compiler. Marc does not think it is necessary. He sees our trying to require such a thing as engineering interference.
3. We need to define the Basic Turf Set to facilitate the clearing of inactive users. What is in the default Turf Environment?
4. We agreed to turn all logged out users to ghosts for the time being, rather than leave them turned to stone. We need to revise the manual accordingly. This is subject to change (easily) during beta test.
5. Several issues about the Oracle and/or Mail:
 - a. How do answers get to users? In the Mail system? Do you have to go home to your Turf to get your response?
 - b. Can you use ESP from the Oracle?
 - c. Can we make a special login-in disk that allows a player to login as a particular incarnation of the Oracle, for real-time Oracle communications?
 - d. Can we make a mailbox in someone's pocket? (Quantum believes that Turfs are not going to be used much at all.... that since there is virtually nothing you can do there, once people leave they will rarely come back, except maybe to store things. Therefore, it is cumbersome and counter to the design intent to make them go back just to get the mail....). Can we make a "book of letters" in someone's pocket, where mail gets delivered to?
6. The Avatar Directory, if it exists, should probably not be an object you carry, but rather something in a particular location. Perhaps they exist at TelePort booths? In any case, this is a low priority at this point, and we should not worry about it overmuch. We will defer a decision until later. Maybe a "Who's Who" of Avatars in the Hall of Records?
7. Tom Canaday is going to the Habitat SysOp.
8. QL has finished the Oracle software, but is unsure about the powers of the Oracle. There is currently no way for an Oracle to affect an avatar (like give him/her a Goathead.... They need specification on this.
9. Janet says she has said to us that GHU is clearly not acceptable as it currently is proposed, because the powers are too pervasive. We need to define and specify! What can the Oracle do? (The fact that she had said that was news to me. Does anyone know about this?)

10. Regarding Avatar death: What happens when people die? Since we don't have exit interviews at the moment, do they just go back to PC? Are they sent to their Turf? This is an important design decision. Also, apparently due to the existence of ghosting, it is likely no one will ever die? You can always "go ghost" when you are in a threatening situation? QL reports that there are virtually no guns in the world now anyway. Is this being fixed? We need to specify death and exit interviews.

11. There seems to be a problem with the revised downtown. First, apparently they did not know we were undertaking such a massive revision. Did we tell them? Also, Janet reports some difficulty in uploading part of a region, or a region revision where you are supposed to keep some stuff, and replace some other stuff.

12. The question was raised as to whether we had over-designed the existing Turfs. (Apparently there are some that don't work right because there is too much stuff, or foregrounds and backgrounds are set up right.... Do we know about this?) Do we need to replace all the existing Turfs with a simpler model?

13. The RANT: Marc wonders if we and they have a completely different idea of what it is. Marc says it can't be a long, linear, text thing in Habitat. You can have such a thing in the Just For Fun listing of the Rant, but due to text transmission problems and heirarchical menu problems, the Rant in the world will be nothing more than a page of one-liners. Does this match what we are thinking? (Apparently not....) Can we make the Rant a container, and use the contents as objects? Or can we change the user interface on the book object to allow for menu-level inquiry, so that people can select from a table of contents? If the Rant is expected to be dynamic, then it should be delivered to pockets as an object. If it is dynamic, they people only buy it once. If it is not, then we have a huge garbage collection problem for all the old Rants....

14. We have discussed a "world status" screen that greets everyone each time they log in.... telling them what's new in the world, and other essential information. I thought we had agreed to do this. Janet had apparently not heard of such a thing. We need to clear this up.

15. There are too few ATM's, too few pieces of paper, and too few mailboxes, according to QL reports. Mail seems to be a big problem for them. They don't think it is useful. (This is partly a design issue--they see the essential design elements of Habitat to be communication between people. They think we are designing unnecessary limits on communication into the world, and that may cause us big problems. Use of mail and paper are examples. They think that finding and sending mail are sufficiently cumbersome as to be almost useless in game play.)

16. The Head shop is still blocked up. No one knows how bad it will be when we actually get it running. Do we know why it is not working now?

17. Regarding Coming Attractions: They need to know what is required for each of the items on the Coming Attractions document. Every time we say "special programming required," they need to know who is going to do it, and by when.... They question whether some of that stuff is needed for beta, because some of it is so new to them....

18. Regarding Adventure Master powers. We need some special doors that only Adventure Masters can enter, to allow us to limit access to certain areas.

19. There is need to clarify how objects are cloned or copied, both for vendors and for adventures that are object-based. For example, if someone finds a clue to an adventure, does it get replaced for someone else, or is it only one person's game?
20. Home decoration, jukeboxes, and keys were elements that there seemed to be confusion about. We should make sure the organizations have the same understanding.
21. The intelligent counter in the Pawnshop apparently does not work. When will it?
22. Theatres vs. Auditorium. They seemed surprised by all of our theatre-based additions. Marc pointed out that we can't have any interactions with the audience using the current ghost system, so we can do auditorium functions. I told them I thought that what you were thinking was more theatre-like. People could watch, but were not expected to actively participate. Queueing people to appear in person on a game show or talk show needs to be addressed however.
23. Where does the Arcade fit? This was another "surprise" to them. When will it work? What will it do? What about the Stock Exchange? When will it work? What kinds of books are in the Library? Who is doing the book management program (or whatever)?
24. They need specifics on the functioning of City Hall. Who is doing it, by when? Is it a beta function? Who runs scheduling to rent a storefront?
25. Marc reports apparently major crashes of the C-64, with screen garbage, during the last weekend test. This he says indicates problem with C-64, not with host. (This is probably old news, but I am reporting because we discussed it.) Janet says we don't have enough (any?) error messages, that they have complained about this before, and we have said we can't do it. Therefore, the user does not know what is going on when it crashes. Marc said he had to re-boot four times in thirty minutes.
26. Marc says we should have a rental dataline monitor to see if we are sending garbage out. I have never heard of such a thing. Do we need it?
27. Janet says she thinks the easiest way to get capacity handling fixed is for Chip to write it, rather than for Chip to try to explain it to her. She is at this point suspicious of how much time it will take to explain and re-explain and de-debug it if she does it. Has this been discussed?

Summary: They think the project is sufficiently far from release-state that February is the earliest we could be done, and that is if everything goes right (which it never has to this point). They are concerned that there are big areas of unknowns, that we won't discover until we get the thing working, and that some big re-design may be possible. For instance, they think that if we can't get the region transition thing speeded up, we will have a significant game play problem.

The communication channel from now on is going to be with Cathy Anderson on their side, and Nancy on our side. That of course does not substitute for direct technical discussions between any of us and Janet, Marc, or whomever regarding development and debugging. But the design discussions need to be focused on Cathy. Communication is essential. There are too many ambiguities to ensure that we are using our time efficiently at this point.

Please review this and then let's discuss anything that is not clear and/or resolved.