CS3012 – Biography of a Software Engineer

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Markus Persson, a.k.a. Notch, is a Swedish videogame designer and programmer, most known for founding the company Mojang and creating the open world sandbox game Minecraft. He was born the 1st of June 1979 and began programming games at a young age. He has a strong stance against piracy and large companies having monopolies on things exploiting them. He is a member of the Swedish Pirate Party because of this.

Markus began programming at a young age having started programming at seven years old on his fathers’ commodore 128 and made his first game at eight, a text-based adventure game using type-in programs. He continued to have an interest in the game development industry later in life having worked for King and Jalbum. The demo for Minecraft was released in 2009 when he founded Mojang. Minecraft was his biggest project by far and has influenced the world of programming. He founded the company Mojang in 2010 when Minecraft officially released along with Carl Manneth and Jakob Porser.

He sold Mojang to Microsoft in 2014 for $2.5 billion and then left the company. Since then he travels the world while programming new games in his spare time. Notch has made it clear that he doesn’t plan on making a game as big as Minecraft again, or any large game for that matter. He made this clear in a blog post that was written while making the deal with Microsoft saying "I love games and I love to program, but I don’t make games with the intention of them becoming huge hits, and I don’t try to change the world". He doesn’t enjoy the fame that came with making such a successful game saying "I’ve become a symbol. I don’t want to be a symbol, responsible for something huge that I don’t understand, that I don’t want to work on". Regardless of whether he wanted it or not however what he made with Minecraft was hugely successful and influential, which brought more new people into the world of programming and game design.

Minecraft was a big hit in the gaming industry, having sold 154 million copies across all platforms, which means it’s the second bestselling game of all time. There is no main objective to the game although there are achievements that the player can unlock, making it an open world adventure game. The player can choose what to do within the game themselves whether it be exploring, building, questing or anything else. It has three main modes for gameplay – survival, adventure and creative. Survival is the most common mode where the player must survive monsters and hunger while playing. Adventure mode allows players to experience maps made by other players and go through an adventure. Creative mode gives the player access to every item in the game and allows them to focus on building.

Minecraft even had a way of creating basic programming in game. You could use an item called ‘redstone’ which was able to carry signals like a wire. It’s possible to use other items to change the signal strength, invert it or switch it on or off. Players found ways to use this to create some basic circuits and even programs in-game such as calculators, since it’s logic closely follows binary logic. This system was an introduction to programming for many young people and got people started creating their own stuff. It was certainly used to inspire players to learn more about programming and brought in a new wave of programmers.

Minecraft was written in java using eclipse as an IDE. While it as written complicated also easily added on to or modified. The fan community noticed and responded to this, many learning programming or using their pre-existing skills to create mods for the game itself creating more ways for the game to be experienced. With no restrictions on what could be added to the game the mods come in many different forms. Some add new functionality, others make new areas to explore and some seemed to make it into a whole new game by added questlines or goals. There are thousands of mods for the game with more coming out all the time. A lot of the mods are even being updated and taken care of as the game updates and patches are introduced. Given the popularity and number of mods, Minecraft had a serious impact on getting people to learn programming and game design in order to create these mods. As such, it inspired many more people to become programmers.

Notchs’ creation of Minecraft opened up opportunities to help many things, programming one of them. It brought in a new want to learn about programming as well as game design. Many programmers and game designers had their start making mods for or playing in Minecraft. Notch may not have wanted to make something revolutionary but there’s no denying that’s exactly what he’s done with the game and as such has changed the world of programming by introducing a fresh new wave of programmers.