# Chapter 1: Orbis

## Red Lion and Sun

I had arrived at the Red Lion and Sun a busy, bustling old pub at Highgate, London, a bit early that day, it was an unusual place to hold a meeting to handover the design and implementation details to any team whatsoever, but it was 2013 and keeping the affairs casual had become the norm by now. Matt who was the software architect and my boss Richard who was the Creative Director arrived afterward, followed by our in-house graphics designer Kathryn and finally the product manager of our company Mr. Zhang. My belly was still not accustomed to a full English breakfast at early morning hours so I was having cereals and fried eggs, it was a perfect breakfast meeting out in the English summer.

A new version of the flagship product of our online gaming company Digital Dreams was to be launched within some 6 to 8 months. So, as it was called, Orbis was an online virtual world platform designed and developed by Digital Dreams which was started back in 2003. By now it was been 5 years I was working in game design and the journey of working in a tech company alongside engineers, artists and people from variety of other fields was both challenging and thrilling. I was promoted to lead designer just six months back, and I was buckling down the concept design for various other games the company developed. Investors were finally ready to pour money to develop the new version of Orbis, and now I was excited over this new project I was going to be assigned as a game designer and that’s was why may be I ended up bit early that day.

Dr.Zhang proceeded to tell Matt that they will be employing some additional 5 servers as the market research had predicted increase in gamers as well as that we needed increased graphics appeal. I had never bothered myself with the technical details and my work largely influenced and got influenced by the graphics that Kathryn designed. Dr.Zhang never spoke in much detail only the top level details about the schedules, teams and market research were discussed by him. It was now Richards turn to give us the further briefing. The new version of Orbis was to be designed over the top of the previous game engine, which made the technical part of implementation bit easy, but most importantly the major change was needed to bring about in the game play design. We were having many signups by gamers or Residents as we called them within the Orbis but we were not able to retain them, it was now my responsibility to alter the game play so as to keep our Residents within the system. Kathryn was then briefed about the new graphics that needed to be developed to run on the newly acquired graphics processors or GPU’s as the tech guys liked to call them. As the meeting finished three of us took the underground to Kings Cross where our headquarters was located and Richard and Dr. Zhang went to Luton Airport, they were to travel to Zurich later afternoon to have meeting with our investors, and that was why they called upon a breakfast meeting in a pub, on the way.

## The Studio

We got to the office at St. Pancras Square within half an hour, it was a great day, I liked my office, and I liked the environment, the minimalist furniture, the Macs and Xerox machines, the coffee room and lounge. It was all perfect, all that mattered to be fulfilled from my side was now to fire-up my laptop and pour in my creativity and ingenuity to design the most acceptable version of Orbis to retain Residents and this is where the entire conflict began, the moment I sat down, on my chair, entire external reality now coalesced to this singular process of requiring to that one part of my being to put to work and that one part which compelled me to reformulate my entire life and everything I had into it, that one part which got screwed up, which is my Mind. The next 21 years of my life revolved around just this, my mind, and its incessant obsessions.

After the office I usually had some me-time in the Costa on the way to underground Metro. I enjoyed sipping the Caramel Cappuccino, which was much better than what the vending machine in the office had to offer. I had a great morning, it was exciting, but then the day followed, of course I was not supposed to deliver anything at all that same day, and Richard was pretty cool and lenient with the deadlines unless I didn’t stretch it unreasonably, but I never did. But that was not problem, the problem was lately I been sucked into this rabbit hole of some previously unknown part of my being.

## Café Latte

So I entered the Costa in the Arcade near the station, as usual Choi took the order and asked me to wait to the serving side, and as usual the pierced girl handed me my Cappuccino, I felt the warmth of the cup, not letting it to spill from the slit, grabbed my usual seat by the window overlooking all the busy pedestrians rushing hurriedly towards the station. I always indulged in that complex of condescending them who at that moment didn’t had that luxury of sitting and sipping, asking myself, why do they all pace up when the next train is right there in just 5 minutes, knowing perfectly well that I will be part of that same ritual in just about 10 minutes as I’ll finish my indulgence.

Most of the days I will find myself waiting for the 17:45 underground to Bromley where I lived on the Scott’s Avenue with my husband Arjun, on all the other days I’ll catch the 18:00. It took exactly 42 minutes considering the change at Victoria. Some of the days, I will stroll in Waitrose before heading home to pick up something special for dinner, apart from all the weekends when I would almost go, and I am home.

*TALK ABOUT SADNESS*

*Life is passing by while you are drowned in sadness.*

## Arjun

*SHE IS HOME AND A SCENE INVOLVING HER CONVERSATION WITH ARJUN. NOTHING SPECIFIC BUT MILDLY EVELUATING HER FEELINGS ABOUT HER RELATIONSHIP WITH ARJUN.*

## What is Orbis?

Richard and Dr. Zhang had a successful undertaking in Zurich. We were able to get the required funding, which meant that, now some of the funds were allocated to me for the purpose of pure research. For the most effective and optimised implementation of those systems I consulted experts in fields of Psychology, Business Management, Sociology, Mathematics and Computer Science.

So, Orbis was basically not a game, in the sense of a usual computer game, it didn’t had any specific task inside it to be fulfilled, no manufactured conflict, no dragon which you have to slay and no princes that you have to save. It was a virtual platform where gamers or Residents as we called them were free to build their own worlds, interact with other Residents or to the simulated Orb Agents, make online relationships, build cities, shops, watch movies, go on dates, swim through rivers, go on a Cruz on the virtual ocean, do pretty much everything that can be simulated. It turned out we can create entire universes just with our minds.

Beyond all the immersive system design of Orbis there was one big reason to the platform which kept the Residents engaged in the Orbis. There was an internal currency to the Orbis called the Orb Dollar or Orbs and Residents can not only earn and spend and buy the Orbs but also there was a chance to earn real world money. They also would get a stipend inside the Orbis if they subscribe to paid version of the Orbis. These Orbs can then be used to buy what-not inside the Orbis, jewellery, cars, yacht, an apartment overlooking ocean and everything that could be created by the Residents. And there was a way to earn real world money through the Orbis.

So the deal for real world money was that the Residents were positioned in the Orbis environment of their choice, and a level was assigned to that state of Resident and environment combined. This level was called Innocence Level. Whenever the Resident will interact with Orbis, meaning create something or destroy something, or interact with other players inside the Orbis either forming a cordial or hostile relationship the Residents were given points called Karma Points. Based on the actions of the Residents Karma Points were deducted or added. When this count reached certain threshold the Resident was shifted to another level. The deal was that the Residents should interact as much as possible and go from the level within the level and create environment as much complex as possible around them. Earn more Orbs and earn or loose Karma points.

The way to earn money was to get back to the Innocence Level from the deepest level that the Resident has got herself into. The way to get out of the level was to denounce your possessions at that level. Make your possessions part of the Orbis system and convert your possessive relationships into non-attached relating. Once the Karma points are zeroed down, you are at the Innocence Level and you can exchange whatever Orbs you had with the real world Dollars with the current exchange rate of the Orbis banking system.

Orbis had about 20000 CPU’s connected together at several facilities across Europe and the United States. And in the virtual space there were 250,000 people per day that were wondering around the active city, the population of Orbis was kind of equal to a small city, the space itself was 10 times the size of London and was about as densely built out. Unlike the real world and like the internet the whole thing was expanded rapidly, so that kind of exploration was matched up with the amount of content that was in there, it provided space of truly infinite possibilities. Orbis had some 100 million user created objects, an object meaning anything in virtual world like a book or a vase which had a code attached to it. The Residents created anything and everything that can fascinate human imagination and of course that can be permitted by the virtual environment. The sheer scale of what people can do when they are enabled to do was amazing.

You could also go into outer space and explore, and exploring space was one of the most sought out things to be done in Orbis. Why was that, why do gamers as people wanted to do that, because if they went in the outer space they could begin again, they will become someone on that journey and they will leave society and life as someone behind, and they would transform irreversibly. If they travelled far enough they had no idea what they are going to find out there. It was so different than what we see on Earth that anything was possible. We as humans crave the idea of getting into new place and creating what’s possible.

Everything in there was like sea of information that Residents interacted with. What made the difference was that information was presented to the human gamers using the most powerful symbols rather than text. The important thing was the experience of creating, consuming and exploring information was implicitly and inherently social, and they were always there with other people. Humans are social creatures and we enjoy the information in presence of others, it’s essential to us.

The virtual world platform was not some kind of utopia. The magic of infinite possibilities of anything can happen can only happen in an environment where you really know that there is a fundamental freedom at the level of individual actor, at the level of Lego blocks that make up the world, there was no grand scheme of rules of people interacting, or new way of laying out a city, there was no attempt to structure the mechanism to make it utopian.

Residents could also get pregnant and have a baby in Orbis. Amongst others they built the ability to procure the baby and nurture the baby as a purchasable experience that others can have. If gamers were given the opportunity to create in the world, there was really one thing that they wanted, that was fair ownership of what they created, so the Orbis terms of service provide that gamers retain copyright for any content they create.

## Simulacra

I was in Richard’s office with Kathryn and Matt, I always loved to see the skyline of central London, and all those glass covered skyscrapers stretching to the horizon they felt like hope for our modern civilization, in this age of information. We had discussion about technology and graphics upgrades for the new version of Orbis internally called the ‘Simulacra’. Then Richard told me, “the Simulacra is to be designed to enhance the immersive experience for the residents, to such an extent that the line between their real life experience and their virtual lives should be so much blurred that the Orbis has to become their reality”

Two days down, I was on BA flight WR101 to Bourgogne, I had a scheduled appointment with the fabled Prof. John Baud, a French psychologist who theorised the ‘mass control hypothesis’. The subject of our meeting was effective design of the in-system experience and Residents interaction with the Orbis simulation to enhance their sub-conscious identification with the virtual world.

Prof. Baud explained me that the design of the simulation be done into four aspects, ‘the reflection of reality’, ‘the perversion of reality’, ‘the pretence of reality and finally what the Orbis became ‘a Simulacrum’, which bear no relation to reality whatsoever. The current version replaced all realism and meaning with symbols and signs. The meaning was being so much destabilised that the Residents failed to be sure of what’s real and what’s not real. Advertisement, he advised were to be designed in order to create a hyper-reality, i.e. the content be such that it appears more real than the actual object itself. Visual representations of real world objects, were photo-shopped, modified, placed on strategic places in the Orbis and then made to consume via variety of interactions. Eventually, these digitally mediated imageries stopped being projections of something and grew into their own realities which bore no resemblance to their original, becoming things in themselves, they were what Prof. Baud called ‘Simulacra’, which existed regardless of reality. Prof’s involvement with Digital Dreams was supposed to be confidential, after all we didn’t wanted the deception to be obvious to the Residents.

Back at St. Pancras, Matt, Kathryn and their teams implemented my designs perfectly. The next of the improvisations of the Orbis were to come in advertisements, Richard suggested,” The design of this version needs improved in-game advertisements of myriad of products. You need to design models of how the advertisements will be presented to the Residents, these models will be interactive and should be designed that ways.”

The simulations were programmed to deliver messages to subconscious of gamers. The simulated Ad bill-boards and interactive stations were designed to emotionally influence the subconscious in a fleeting instant, with colour, words, images and music. Subliminal advertising had become the norm of reaching the subconscious, and gamers were exposed to hundreds of subliminal messages each session. Penises and Breasts were concealed in the background of the product placements or on the products themselves, this triggered the arousal and feel good factor which was sub-consciously identified with the product. The humans behind the Residents, just like the simulation were programmed through the visual and auditory media.

In the end what started as a creative endeavour to let people enjoy the virtual world ended up being a dungeon of commerce where all that mattered was the profit. It all got calculated, everything got controlled and

## London Underground

I am on my feet again and moving through this endless motion of humans going towards further going towards furthering. I am going towards the train, my train, if I take the long route from the Underground station towards my house, which sometimes I did if I had to buy the grocery from the supermarket, I would end up going through the Shopping centre lane. Walking over the mosaicked road as I glanced on my right behind the smallest building, I could see the famous Banksy ‘*shop till you drop*’ graffiti on the partially dilapidated construction. It was a nice joke to paint that art so that it can be seen over the shopping avenue.

*PUT MORE STUFF HERE.*

## Cool\_Jaz Delphi

I was the one who helped make the game, I was going to be one who enjoys it. I played into Orbis, for duel reasons, one obvious was to experience the game play myself in order to improve the simulations for other gamers, and the other was an escape, an escape from the mundane reality that I sometimes needed, an escape into world of possibilities, in to dreamlands, into fantasy lands.

When registering for the game the first thing you did was choose a new name for yourself and in that world, in the empire I inhabited I was Jaz Delphi, I always fancied to be princess Jasmine from Disney’s Aladdin, and here was my avatar Cool\_Jaz. Any vestiges of a real-life name were left behind by my new alphanumeric first name and was supplemented by an unrecognisable last name chosen from choices given by the Orbis. The next I choose the ‘avatar’ or online persona, in other words how I was to appear, incorporating height, body shape, skin colour, and hair, or the online version of how I looked, I was pretty in real life as so was how I made my avatar, look just like me, although I made my eye colour blue, I loved that tinge in my eyes.

**“Welcome to ORBIS, please refrain from any hate activity which slurs a real-   
 world individual or real-world community”**

My glowing younger avatar was instantiated on a

# Chapter 2: Break Up

## Trip to French Riviera

What’s up with the travel in this days of consumerism?

Try to stuff your being with as much experiences as possible before you die, because once you are dead, you are dead.

## Costa 2

The strategy is simple, the strategy is society has given you ideals of how you should be. And it has enforced those ideals so deeply in you that you are always interested in the ideal, ‘how you should be’ and you have forgotten who you are.

TALK MORE OF SARTRE PHILOSOPHY THAT MAN IS INDEED FREE TO BEWHO HE WANTS TO BE

## Sameer

Fergusson College, first kiss, romantic love and break-up.

The game of hide and seek.

## House of Fraser

That is when she is sad she goes shopping.

## Sex in Orbis

*The sex took new creative heights.*

## Virtual Life