Virtual Past, Real Future: Playing with Cultural Heritage

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The Findings So Far...

RPG World Complexity

RPGs contain strong depictions of material culture. Capacity to depict intangible culture and to simulate environmental aspects critical to Indigenous cultures require further assessment.

Indigenous Interactive Media

Indigenous groups are highly interested in exploring interactive media for cultural heritage, with several experimental works in development (Purtill, 2016). However, Indigenous collaboration in heritage is difficult worldwide due to past experiences (Zimmerman, 2007).

The Active Audience

Online game communities collate and publish knowledge about game worlds, as well as expanding these worlds through user-developed modifications (mods).

- The Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages wiki project includes more than 45,000 pages.
- More than 20,000 mods exist for Skyrim, some involving extensive new content (e.g., Tropical Skyrim).
- Many mods are controversial in content, indicating potential problems for a more sensitive project.

The Journey Ahead

Although preliminary findings indicate great potential of the RPG approach augmented by fostering active audience engagement, the limits of this approach need to be clearly delineated.

In particular, extensive consultations with Indigenous groups and experts are still required to assess the feasibility of open collaboration with audiences given the frequency of inappropriate or controversial mod projects, and the loss of control involved in open collaboration.

Virtual Meanjin (image source: Virtual Songlines)

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