

LOVE, VIRTUALLY

In the virtual world of Malton, two characters met and fell in love. Nurse HunnyBunches restored Major Longfellow to full health in the safety of a crowded and extremely heavily barricaded hospital. While awaiting the next zombie onslaught, they struck up a conversation.

ML: Umm. Nice description (Nurse HunnyBunches described herself in her profile as “Better than anything YOU ever saw in a centerfold, loser.”)

NH: Yeah, I can tell you like it. As Mae West asked, "Is that a gun in your pocket, or are you just happy to see me?"

ML: That’s for me to know and you to find out. (Major Longfellow’s profile says, “Eros’s gift to women, on one of his better days.”)

Other survivors joined in several rounds of suggestive chatter, after which zombies breached hospital barricades. All the survivors knuckled down to the task of “killing, healing, and barricading.” The next time HunnyBunches and Longfellow met, they picked up where they had left off. Within a few days, she dared him to meet her in a dark warehouse and “see what happens.”

An enormous number of people, all over the world, play so-called massively multi-user online role-playing games (MMORPGs). These games take place in imaginative virtual spaces, and range from text-based environments to high-quality 3-D graphics with sound. Most of them require substantial resources to run, and so charge users a monthly subscription fee. Some, however, leave more to the imagination by creating a virtual world with words, entirely without graphics. Malton, the setting of Urban Dead, is one such world. Players access Urban Dead through a browser, need install no special software, and pay nothing.

As the romance between HunnyBunches and Longfellow developed, the two real-life players longed for something more than story sex. They agreed to join Second Life to continue their affair. Second Life also charges no fees, but contains simple user-designed graphical avatars. Their relationship continued developing, both in terms of the psychological depth of the characters and the explicit sexuality of their lovemaking. Soon, however, they agreed that Second Life was far too tame. They next moved to a for-pay adult website with explicit, 3-D graphics that did not censor players’ activities.

Throughout all these moves, the two characters retained their original names and personalities from Urban Dead and never stepped outside their original roles. One day, Major Longfellow asked Nurse HunnyBunches, “So, what’s your real name?”

NH: Prudence HunnyBunches.

ML: No, I mean your real-world name. Mine is Harry.

NH: LOL.

ML: Sorry. I couldn’t resist. Could you at least tell me what city you live in?

NH: No can do. I’m happily married. If we exchanged real names, it would be the same as cheating on my wife.