Meet Beat

Fourth Meeting: CVE

Dr. J's Evil Plot Finally Revealed!

The fourth meeting of the summer virtual computer science camp will be held at 4pm MDT (3pm PDT). The session will start in Second Life, at Clint Jeffery's Place, Crumbi 234,50, and proceed over to the CVE program on the Idaho server. Get CVE from http://cve.sf.net. It gets updated often, sometimes more than once a day.

It is time now to explain the purpose of all this virtual camp thing. It might be just to have fun, it might be to slip some passive education in past your defenses. It might be because these virtual environments are valuable tools that you can use in other contexts. But probably the purpose of the camp is: to advance Dr. J's Master Plan for taking over the universe. Why else would I be doing this?

As the story goes, Dr. J was playing EverQuest one day (or was it WoW? or was it City of Heroes? It matters not.) when he thought: “Surely this powerful state of the art game technology must be useful for distance education, and for post-school professional development for that matter. Hmm…” Five years later, and we have a summer camp with four 3D-rich virtual environments. The Behemoth, World of Warcraft, is here because it is The State of The Art in building “fun activities” into such an environment. Second Life is here because it is the most easily buildable multi-user environment—look what Sandmeyer has done already. Alice is here because it is the most easy-to-learn-and-use visual programming environment for specifying 3D objects' behaviors. And then there is CVE. CVE is... our own perennially-under-construction research tool whose ultimate goal is to unify all of these other program's best ideas.

Your Role in the CVE

Your role in the CVE sessions is simple: your job is to break the environment as many times as possible, playing normally. You ask lots of questions. You file a bug report for each crash, you get activity points. You login, you chat with others, you look for people with quest symbols above their heads, you write programs in the IDE if you know how to write programs, you invite others to look at your programs with you using the collaborative program editor and debugger. You read others’ bug reports first, and comment when you have the same bug and can add information about it.

CVE: the Cold Truth

I wish CVE were a polished commercial product like WoW or SL, or even a decade-old multi-million dollar big league academic project like Alice. It is not. It is the product of a bunch of New Mexicans and Idahoans and to be fair: Jordanians and Indians, too. I am scrambling to produce usable Mac binaries. My students are scrambling to get the code stabilized after a bunch of recent new features were added.

You will have no trouble finding the bugs to report here. We will appreciate your patience and help to track them all on Source Forge (see the link from http://www.cs.nmsu.edu/~jeffery/vcssc/), our open source host, and will do our best to make get CVE running on your computers and make the CVE sessions interesting. The account creation process is imperfect at the moment. It might crash after it creates a new account; rerun and your account may work. If you have trouble, post a bug report and Jafar will take care of you and create your account on the server manually if need be.

More truth: CVE is a tiny subset about what is good about WoW and SL. It does not have GUI in-world-building yet, but it has quests and activity points and a collaborative programming environment for your C/C++/Java needs. We have two separate 3D worlds on separate server processes at the moment, and intend to connect them and make it easy to move between them and add new ones. And we own all the code, from the 50,000 lines of high level script-like code the client and server are written in to the 100,000 lines of C code virtual machine that they run on.
top of. Woo hoo! We own it, we can shape it, it may be buggy but it is ours.

**Third Meeting Schizophrenic**

Our third session was a sort of split experience. Half the folks logged into World of Warcraft, eventually forming a group in the newbie area known as Deathknell, and leveling characters through the first few levels. There is a learning curve for new players, and trial accounts have some irritating limitations. But as you advance, the game becomes AWESOME. By the time you get your first pet you are thrilled. By the time you get your riding mount, you are ecstatic. And when you finally get your flying mount, you think: second life flying is is not nearly as cool as this.

WoW is mainly fun if you enjoy the fantasy setting. If not, you are supposed to study it clinically and understand what other people like about it, so that you can use those ideas elsewhere. At least that's what I do. In any case, half of the third meeting stayed in Second Life. Sandmeyer has built a several-storey building with very few primitives. Other folks in Second Life need to set some goals for themselves, try to do stuff, and come up with questions.

Some of the topics that came up today included: how to log your chat transcripts to a file so you can see them later (its under Preferences), how to set your Home to my land, so you can teleport anywhere and get back easily, and how to do the Search...Classifieds, teleport to a store with some virtual goods you want to look at, and return quickly. If you don't know how to do these things yet, you should learn them, and also take some time to see more of what is out there in SecondLife.

**Jackalope Update**

Professor Bocaz-Larson is taking over the Virtual Theater portion of the camp, defining activities necessary to put on a production before the end of the camp. If you choose to participate in an acting or production role, you will get activity points for theater quests. DB-L seems to like Second Life alright, it is somewhat likely that the play will be put on there and recorded. Dr. J has found virtual wildlife for sale in second life: rabbits, and antelope-like creatures, but no jackalope so far. If we want one, we have to commission it (I can spend Linden$), or make it. Buying a virtual rabbit and extending it with a few spindly plants on top of its head seems likely. One of you will have to tell me what to buy for play-prop purposes, and if you ask for help with scripting in the group, several folks can probably help with that in either LindenScript or in Alice.

**Planning Ahead**

Next week we are visiting all these four software environments again, but hopefully folks will have an easier time, with the software already installed, accounts created, and so on.

**Quest Suggestions**

Here is a list of CVE quests you can try out. It is fine and good to do as much of this ahead of the Meet as possible, so you have good juicy questions when the Meet happens.

- Download and Install CVE (15).
- Create a CVE account (5).
- Visit Virtual Idaho (5). Can you figure out how many reachable “storeys” are in the Janssen Engineering Building?
- Attend the meet (60).
- Report a CVE bug (10; must be new)
- Comment on an existing CVE bug (5; must add new information)
- Find NPC’s and do in-world quests.
- Write for the Virtual Daily Times (variable points). Participants want to know how to do stuff that you figure out how to do.
- Run a camp session (200 points and up). If you are qualified to lead activities for one or more of the future days of the camp, see Dr. J to discuss your plans and then run a camp session in Alice, Second Life, WoW, or CVE.