AMERICAN SOFTWARE TECHNOLOGY

FAZUUL (1984) — The Forgotten Pioneer of Multiplayer Online Gaming

A historical overview of an early shared-world computer adventure and its South Florida roots

In 1984, long before internet gaming became commonplace, programmer Tim Stryker wrote Fazuul, a multi-user text adventure in which players inhabited the same simulated world. Built for a system called EnterNet, the game helped establish ideas that would later become familiar in online role-playing and shared-world games. Its history is closely tied to the early bulletin-board-system industry in South Florida.

Origins: EnterNet and South Florida

According to a history posted by the Major BBS Restoration Project, Stryker originally wrote Fazuul in 1984 to power EnterNet, a service of American Software Technology in Bay Harbor Islands, Florida. The historical account says EnterNet could accommodate up to 45 simultaneous users. It also cautions that the exact configuration of the early EnterNet service is not fully documented.

Stryker adapted Fazuul into a module for The Major BBS around 1986, but rights issues delayed its release on that platform. The restoration history describes the game as a precursor to features that later appeared in The Major BBS, including real-time interactions, state tracking and an in-game credit system.

The story: a vacation that becomes a trap

Fazuul is set on a distant planet that was once a harsh desert world and had been inhabited by an ancient alien civilization. After humans transformed it into a luxurious intergalactic resort, a breakdown in the tourist transport system left incoming vacationers unable to leave. Players arrive expecting a holiday and instead find a deserted alien city, abandoned technology and the challenge of escaping.

The central objective is to work with fellow stranded travelers, experiment with mysterious artifacts and discover a way off the planet. The game also allows players to explore, socialize, compete and take part in fictional resort activities.

How Fazuul worked

Unlike conventional single-player text adventures, Fazuul placed many players in the same simulated universe. Players navigated by typing directional commands such as north, south, east and west. The game tracked recent locations and adjusted the descriptions it displayed.

Communication was central to the experience. Players could say something to nearby people, shout or yell to reach farther, or whisper privately to another player. They could exchange objects, services,

information and an in-game currency known as crackers.

A distinctive puzzle system involved collecting pieces of alien technology, discovering what they did, and combining devices into more complex inventions. Sharing discoveries about compatible objects and their effects became part of the game's social economy.

Why it mattered

Fazuul brought together several elements now associated with online multiplayer experiences: a shared environment, simultaneous participation, player-to-player communication, trading and cooperative problem-solving. These features were remarkable in the dial-up computer era, when home networking was limited and graphical multiplayer games were not yet widespread.

Its historical significance is best understood as an early pioneer, rather than a claim that it was the first multiplayer online game. Earlier multi-user games existed, but Fazuul was an important part of the lineage of The Major BBS and its later game ecosystem.

Later versions and restoration

The Major BBS historical account mentions variants including Freezuul, Phazuul and Fazuul 9001. It states that the game later became part of the Galacticomm catalog after rights were recovered. Elwynor Technologies acquired Fazuul along with other Galacticomm intellectual property in 2005, according to that account, and announced a port for Worldgroup 3.2 in April 2021.

This restoration has helped preserve a piece of the pre-web online gaming era, when multiplayer worlds were reached through dial-up services and bulletin-board systems.

Historical sources and further reading

1. The Major BBS Forums — "Fazuul" (April 24–25, 2021). Principal source for the gameplay description, development history, rights history and restoration. The user-supplied PDF captures this forum discussion.

2. Break Into Chat — Fazuul. Additional historical reference; details should be cross-checked against surviving primary documentation.

3. The Major BBS. Project and community information on the platform and its preservation.

Editorial note: This overview is based primarily on a retrospective 2021 restoration-project forum post. Some details about the original 1984 EnterNet service remain uncertain; the account itself acknowledges those gaps.