

## And on the Seventh Day

I am tired of it now, but when I was younger I really enjoyed playing “Minecraft” and its later (and quite expensive) upgrade “Universecraft” on my computer. “Minecraft” is simple enough. You just build a computer world from familiar objects, but the latter is on a much larger scale. I had lots of false starts with “Universecraft”, creating weird universes that did not work, until eventually, I managed to create a reasonable universe.

It’s a simple game to start with – you just pick some starting conditions from a list, and the universe either works or it fails.

Once I had a working universe, I just let it go for a while, something like 13 billion years in the game, and then I decided to play around with it a bit more. By this time, the game’s algorithms had become much more sophisticated, and the computer it used was much more powerful so I could experiment more. I decided to put some life into the mix, starting with a little planet that the computer had created that looked suitable. Once I did that, I left it for ages again to see what happened, and nothing did for a long while. Eventually, some large creatures appeared from the program but I did not like them. They were big and fierce and rather slow to move, so I intervened to destroy them. It was simple – I just diverted a large asteroid and directed it at the planet and wiped them out. I had intended to wipe everything out and start the life part again, but some creatures survived and I rather liked them, so I let them live and evolve through the program’s algorithms.

The problem was that these creatures were not very clever and I somewhat lost interest in them. I decided to spice things up a bit by adding some intelligence to some of the more lively creatures – a group of hairy creatures with a tendency to walk on two legs. This was a successful move, and soon these creatures were developing nicely and were interesting to watch. The problem was that they kept destroying the other, more harmless animals, but I let them get on with it for a while.

Although they developed, it was quite slow. I had to inject some ideas occasionally to speed them along. I started by introducing them to fire, then to how they could produce metals and what could be done with them, and that really speeded things up. They discovered the wheel by themselves which impressed me a lot.

I must say that I broke some of the game’s rules. You are supposed to be an interested observer, but I could not stop myself from dabbling and sometimes micromanaging the creatures. They were occasionally threatened by much larger and more violent creatures, so I would eliminate those dangerous creatures from the game. “Universecraft” called it “selective extinction” and advised heavily against it, but I ignored that. I did not want to see my favourite creatures hurt.

They hit something of a dead end at one point. They were cutting down trees to make fire at an incredible rate, so I had to stop that. I put some solid fuel into the planet mix and showed them how to find it. Then I put liquid fuel a bit deeper in their planet and finally some gaseous fuel too, so that they could run their clever machines.

I admit to being a bit naughty by creating some crazy theories for them to discover, concerning waves and particles and gravitational waves. The ideas were nonsense and made no real sense, but they felt that they had discovered them and convinced themselves that the ideas were correct. They are very curious creatures so I thought it would give them something to believe in. I also broke the game rules by introducing the idea behind how a computer works. I did it slowly, so that I could claim that they discovered it themselves, but clearly they are not that clever.

And now I am grown up, and no longer have time to play "Universecraft" the way I did, so I have broken one final rule. I have introduced "Minecraft" into their computer systems. Now I am just going to sit back and watch what happens. Will they go on to develop "Universecraft" and create universe simulations of their own? Will they manage to work out that they are in a simulation? (One of them created a series of films which seemed to suggest that they had found out, but nobody believed it). I look forward to seeing what happens.

I've done all I can. It is time to put away childish games and get on with real life.

Ron Duckling