

Unique Online “Role-Playing Novel” (RPN) Goes Gold, Records 7th Episode

(Online Interactive Fiction - play.wizardreborn.com – for immediate release)

What do you get when you take a literary novel, add in role-playing game elements, combine original music and artwork, and sprinkle in some social awareness? A unique and innovative online “role-playing novel” (RPN) that reads like a story, plays like a game and requires the player to make intriguing choices that helps build real-world awareness regarding the quality of choices we all make in life.

After two years in development (including the past six months in beta status), the “Wizard Reborn” RPN has gone gold with the release of episode seven “Siege of the Soulless,” available for free at play.wizardreborn.com. Set within the fantasy world of Mairiga, players begin the RPN as an adolescent human growing-up in the farming village of Tabin, interacting with a series of page-based scenarios and making decisions that ultimately affect the player’s body, mind, spirit and reputation. Modeled like a contemporary television series and developed as a single-player persistent browser-based game, each episode of the RPN combines text, graphics, music and role-playing game elements, and takes about an hour to play.

“My goal was to inject the essence of popular role-playing games into the standard linear novel experience,” says Scott M. Huelsman, who designed and programmed as well as authored the RPN. “If one recalls the ‘pick-a-path’ paperback adventures from the 1980s, I’ve basically taken that approach to the Internet, adding integrated combat systems, statistic tracking, automated mapping features and simple yet meaningful decision-making elements. The result is still a linear novel, but one in which the player makes intriguing and even fateful choices each step of the way, and when combined with original music and artwork, provides for a uniquely interactive reading experience.”

Each “page” of the RPN consists of just a paragraph or two, focusing on a central character, event or specific set of circumstances within the story. The player is then presented with either one or three separate options from which to choose, tailored to the encounter at hand. Sometimes the choice selected will allow the player to buy/sell items, attack hostile creatures, enter a password or even spin the wheels of a town slot machine. More often, however, each choice represents a different way of handling the situation, affecting the player’s body, mind, spirit or reputation within the RPN and determining the specific outcome of the encounter. Each episode consists of 40 or so page-based scenarios, allowing ample opportunity to directly and permanently affect the player and his recruited adventuring party.

“My real hope with the RPN is that players will not only enjoy a terrific story, but gain a better appreciation for the decisions they make and how those decisions affect the lives of others,” says Huelsman, who has authored seven complete episodes now and intends to write many dozens more, releasing the next in the series every four to six weeks. “While individual decisions alone may seem trivial, collectively they can substantially influence

the mind, body and spirit of everyone involved, and I'm using the RPN as a sort of metaphor to that end."

The RPN is the latest in a series of efforts developed and produced by Huelsman over the past two decades. After designing a computer role-playing game in the early 1990s, Huelsman wrote the corresponding "Wizard Reborn" novel (originally entitled "Convictions") and set it to multimedia in 1996, including original graphics, music, audio and video (see the website for Adobe Flash and Apple Quicktime versions). A Flash-based slideshow summarizing the novel (and set to an original fourteen track music CD) was developed in 2003, a print-on-demand version of the novel was placed online in 2007, and the RPN conceived and developed over the past two years.

"It's all coming full-circle," Huelsman adds, referring to his future plans with the RPN. "I originally wrote 32 separate adventures for the computer RPG effort some 25-30 years ago, and now I'm finally implementing those storylines through the RPN. With my latest episode 'Siege of the Soulless,' I'm telling the original 'Wizard Reborn' novel and will continue to do that through episodes eight, nine and ten. After that, I've got a bunch more storylines to go through; it's a labor of love, and something I'll probably do indefinitely."

Scott lives with his wife Susan and son James in Waunakee, WI, works full-time as a Webmaster for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and does freelance web development and consulting through 'The Huelsman Way' at www.thehway.com.

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