

## Fighting windmills

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*When Don Quixote meets 'Tower Defense', the tables are turned around*

*By Christos Iosifidis*

It is not every day that you see young game developers wanting to “resurrect” old classic novels into videogames. But these 30-days, intense, cross-collaborative productions of the DADIU (Danish Academy for Digital, Interactive Entertainment) program are characterized by something inherently quixotic: ambition.

'Don Q' is an attempt to bring the famous novel by Miguel de Cervantes into the videogames world by combining its legendary protagonist, Don Quixote, and his imaginary world with a fresh take on the popular 'Tower Defense' gameplay.

But achieving a successful adaptation of a classic novel into a videogame, let alone coupling it with innovative gameplay, is a difficult task. Numerous titles every year invest a lot of effort and money to enliven the memories of a novel, a poem, a theatrical play only to be met by controversy and mediocre commercial results.

So, how can a dozen of young ambitious students overcome the odds and triumph over where many others fail? To find out, I visited IT University, home of the 'Team Quixotic' group, ten days before release date to set the question directly.

Combining a literature masterpiece with matching gameplay is a real challenge says Jesper Nielsen, project manager of the group. Especially in such a short period of time and with the program setting the bar high, there needs to be a hierarchy in goals; the primary goal is to make a fun game Jesper points out. With that in mind, 'Team Quixotic' is aiming at two targets with one hit; “we are making a game about Don Quixote, but we are also making a game with reverse Tower Defense gameplay” Jesper explains.

So how does it work with two intrinsically different components, a narrative and a gameplay, having an influence on the game? You have to remain strictly within the boundaries; obviously when you look at both of them, there will be plenty of conflicts and discussions about how far we can take them, but we chose a strict stance in front of the dilemmas says Jesper with Malte Pedersson, game director, agreeing. You have to extract the best qualities out of each component and combine them together rather than mixing them.

Thus, on the storytelling level, the focal point is on the characters and the universe and not the narrative of the book, Malte elaborates: “Many people haven’t read the book, but they can all identify Don Quixote when they see him in the game. I believe that we can convey the character and the universe into the game so that even players that do not know the whole story can still have an exciting experience that would awaken their curiosity for Don Quixote and make them want to know more”.

As Malte elaborates, that is why the look and feel of the game must be accessible and direct to the player. The goofy graphic style with vibrant colors and ridiculously funny animations along with the hilarious sound effects and the marching music score steer to that direction. It must look funny and sound funny, after all Don Quixote’s world is a twisted universe with a strong dose of satire and humor, Malte explains.

With the theme adding a handful of laughter to the overall experience, I turn the subject to gameplay which for ‘Team Quixotic’ is not a laughing matter, as Jesper is quick to stress out. “We wanted to create original gameplay, which could be based on an existing game genre to heighten our chances for success” Jesper points out to me. In other words, a fresh taste based on a proven recipe; this way the game doesn’t taste like old food served on a new plate nor, so exotic that only an exquisite audience will appreciate it. In this case is ‘Tower Defense’ twisted all the way: ‘Reverse Tower Defense’.

‘Tower Defense’ is a whole genre of games; the term might not sound all that familiar, let alone for ‘Reverse Tower Defense’, but chances are that you have come across one of its hundreds, if not thousands, variants across the web. Myriads of mindless enemies marching in waves through a field, receiving the fire of your defense towers, only to reach the finish line and score a point against you, or just be eliminated by your strategically deployed defenses. Only that in ‘Don Q’, you get to control these mindless creatures and fight against the towers. You will receive a firsthand experience of having to command an impossible army that keeps you from achieving glory.

And that is when the gameplay and Don Quixote are finally starting to make sense together. The towers that look like grain silos, the manic lemon trees that attack everyone that is passing next to them, the vicious scarecrows that are blocking the way to the top of the hill and of course the tyrannical windmill that oversees the valley. All these imaginary enemies and the armies of peasants that are made out of thin air to face them in combat, become part of the metaphor; what’s the purpose of attacking a haystack or a scarecrow? Collecting points? Only a madmen

and videogamers would ever do something like that. Perhaps the Don Quixotes of our times are sitting in front of computer monitors instead of mounting skinny old steeds.



*Sancho Panza, your loyal squire, driving the war wagon with all the troops. Build an army and attack!*



**Route your armies through a step-by-step attack plan.**



Attack all your enemies, from vicious scarecrows and evil haystacks, to nasty grain silos and manic lemon trees.