

AN AMERICAN GAMER IN NOTTINGHAM

By Ethan S., Phoenix, AZ

Some of the fondest memories I have of England come from a little out-of-the-way gaming café called Limbo, which sat quietly on a narrow Nottingham side street. To a passer-by, it could have been just any other shop, but to the regulars Limbo was something special. It was here that my friends and I would meet every week to kick back and relax after a stressful week of school. In a way, it was our escape from student life, and it was as the British would say, "lovely." The café was well equipped, with everything from satisfying fast food to a vast library of gaming titles. Sure the prices were ridiculously high for unemployed teenagers, with ten pounds or more being spent on every visit, but we still managed to spend every other weekend playing video games, eating steaming hot ramen noodles, and laughing as the hours went by.

The café was fairly small, but just large enough to accommodate the six or seven of us that would show up around three o'clock looking for a thrill on an otherwise dull Saturday afternoon. Upon entering the establishment a dangling bell above the door would announce your arrival, causing many faces to look up momentarily, before returning their otherwise uninterrupted gazes to their screens. The room temperature was always at a pleasant level, an added bonus when living in the damp and dreary English Midlands. You couldn't help but grin as you stepped inside such a warm and vibrant place. Inside were two rows of state-of-the-art computers and a small black table towards the back where you could buy food and drinks, providing that the owner wasn't occupied playing games himself. The walls were ablaze with canary yellow and streaks of lustrous blue, creating a fun and lively atmosphere. Posters of the latest games adorned the wall to the right. Everything from the comical characters of Team Fortress to the quizzical creatures of Spore hung on the wall acting as eye candy for the gamers.

The regulars would undoubtedly agree that the computers were what made Limbo so exciting. The café housed around twenty or so computers, all lined up neatly on two long oak tables. Each was enclosed in a sleek black reflective case which bounced the radiant colors of the walls around the room. In addition to their attractive appearance was their outstanding hardware that allowed you to play games at lightning speed with stunning graphics. You could almost feel the game's detail pouring out of the screen as you played, sometimes causing you to gasp as sun soaked bullets and catastrophic explosions rattled the scene. It was amazing to see these breathtaking visuals on a glossy high definition monitor with Dolby surround sound feeding the music directly into your ears. The dangerous screams of gunfire and the cries of your companions in the distance really immersed you in the game. As if the computers weren't enough, the appeal of sitting on the world's most comfortable office chairs tended to seal the deal.

The rich smell of ramen noodles was continuously present in the café, as it was the main source of nutrition for Limbo's gamers. The food was far from gourmet but for those questing in Outland or raiding in the halls of Karazhan it did more than serve its purpose. The café was always stocked to the brim with a vast assortment of fast food. The owner claimed that he had it all, and he did. The regulars had an endless appetite for treats as evidenced by the wrappers that piled high alongside their keyboards.

Screaming down the microphone over Counter-Strike was easily complimented by an ice cold Pepsi and a pack of creamy Mini Oreos. Whether it be packets of crisps or sticky sugar coated waffles, the gamers didn't seem to mind. After all, and most importantly, it saved them a long walk down Nottingham's chilly streets in search of nourishment.

Limbo always drew a wide variety of people which helped to keep the environment interesting. Depending on the time of day one could get a completely different feel from the place. Typically you would find teenagers like myself, playing games for recreation, however, you would not always find this to be the case. Earlier in the morning on the weekend, the younger crowd of new-coming pre-teens would wander in for their daily dose of World of Warcraft. On the other hand, towards the end of the day a new much more mature crowd would pass through the doors, still wearing their smart business attire, and just dropping in to relieve some of their work related stress. The café was always bustling with various people, meaning that new friends were frequently made, and that there was always someone to play against.

One of the most enjoyable things about Limbo, was going there with your mates. I have always felt that gaming is much better when you're with other people, especially those that you're friends with. The ability to see the aggravated faces of your opponents as you take them down adds an extra element of excitement to the game. The phrase "Red Team Wins" always felt much more satisfying when you were sitting side by side with the recently defeated Blue team. These feelings were further intensified in the tournaments and all nighters that Limbo occasionally held. The tournaments, or "tourneys" as the regulars called them, would offer gamers generous prizes of up to 50 pounds for an hour of competitive game play. There was little chance that you would actually win one of the tournaments because of the professional gamers that would show up to play in them, but the sensation associated with the prize and play time against professionals was exhilarating. The all nighters were equally as exciting as the tournaments, because you and your friends could play similar games non-stop through the night.

I will always look back fondly on the time I spent in Limbo. For an average teenager like myself, it's obvious to see why Limbo was one of the main highlights of my two years living in England. The vibrant atmosphere, state of the art machines, extensive gaming library, and the enjoyment of gaming with friends were all extremely appealing to me. The whole establishment radiated an immense feeling of fun and excitement that I was always eager to be a part of. The next time I visit England I know where I will be going first.