

Appendix D – Text of “LambdaMOO Takes Another Direction” (LTAD)

LambdaMOO Takes Another Direction

<Thursday, May 16, 1996>

On December 9, 1992, Haakon posted “LambdaMOO Takes A New Direction” (LTAND). Its intent was to relieve the wizards of the responsibility for making social decisions, and to shift that burden onto the players themselves. It indicated that the wizards would thenceforth refrain from making social decisions, and serve the MOO only as technicians. Over the course of the past three and a half years, it has become obvious that this was an impossible ideal: The line between “technical” and “social” is not a clear one, and never can be. The harassment that ensues each time we fail to achieve the impossible is more than we are now willing to bear.

So, we now acknowledge and accept that we have unavoidably made some social decisions over the past three years, and inform you that we hold ourselves free to do so henceforth.

1. We Are Reintroducing Wizardly Fiat

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In particular, we henceforth explicitly reserve the right to make decisions that will unquestionably have social impact. We also now acknowledge that any technical decision may have social implications; we will no longer attempt to justify every action we take.

Players will still have a voice, however. Your input is essential. We will keep our existing institutions for now, with the modifications described below, but we encourage you to develop ideas for replacing these institutions (as will be described in section 2).

a. Petitions

The petition system will remain in its current form, with the following change:

In cases where difficulties arise that were unanticipated by the vetting process, we reserve the right to re-interpret and/or explicitly veto any clause of any passed ballot.

We will continue to vet petitions, in order to minimize the use of ballot veto, and we will continue to do so in terms of the existing vetting criteria in most cases. However, we will not rule out the possibilities of vetting being denied for other reasons, or of the vetting criteria being revised by fiat.

b. Arbitration

We explicitly reserve

- the right to veto any Arbitrator decision, particularly one that significantly impairs the ability of the wizards to do their jobs.
- the right to veto any Arbitration Change Proposal that is clearly not a “minor change” in the spirit of *Ballot:Arbitration (#50392) or that significantly impairs the ability of the wizards to do their jobs.

These may be temporary measures, as we hope to facilitate revision or replacement of Arbitration so that it may more adequately meet the needs of the community.

c. Wizardly Actions with Social Implications

The wizards will no longer refrain from taking actions that may have social implications. In three and a half years, no adequate mechanism has been found that prevents disruptive players from creating an intolerably hostile working environment for the wizards. The LTAND ideal that we might somehow limit ourselves solely to technical decisions has proven to be untenable.

2. Alternatives to Wizards Making Social Decisions

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We encourage you, the players, to devise new mechanisms that will help minimize the need for the wizards to make unilateral social decisions. Several mechanisms, most notably the Arbitration system, seem less than ideal for the purpose, yet are too deeply entrenched to be changed with the petition system. We would like to try new mechanisms and to enable more radical changes than the current petition system will allow. We would like the players to propose ideas for major new institutions, and ways to select among the proposals. We hope this will introduce a new dynamism to LambdaMOO that will allow us to find better solutions to some of our more fundamental problems.

Similarly, we hope to facilitate an overhaul of the current petition and ballot system if the players want it.

Do keep in mind, though, that we cannot keep LambdaMOO running without the wizards Haakon has selected. “Cyberspace” and “new social reality” rhetoric aside, so long as the MOO is located on a single RL machine at a single RL site subject to RL laws and liabilities, there will be those deemed responsible for the use of that hardware. Part of the need for administrators is also inherent in the LambdaMOO security model and the organization of LambdaCore, while some of this need is a consequence of various quirks of LambdaMOO society (e.g., the correspondence between RL identities and MOO identities needing to remain secret and yet the need for someone to maintain it). While we might consider ways to decentralize some of these tasks, the fact remains that we simply can’t decentralize everything. We are still open to your suggestions for ways to decentralize what we can.

Suggestions such as:

- persons not well trusted by Haakon might be granted wizard bits as a result of popular election, or
 - we might set up a “wizard machine” to run arbitrary wizardly code with NO human intervention at all
- are not acceptable, however. There may be site administrators somewhere who will accept the risks involved in implementing these ideas, but we will not.

3. Rejection of the New Direction?

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We realize that not everyone will agree that this is the best new direction LambdaMOO might take. We don't doubt that some of the polemics among you will be able to come up with a different slant, e.g. (just to save you some trouble),

- wizardly blackmail
- military coup
- martial law
- nuclear terrorism

Some of you may find the new direction so disagreeable that you will consider ways to force an end to the new direction or ways to make the wizards' lives miserable because of it. Instead of making the use of civil disobedience or wizard harassment be the necessary means for shutting down LambdaMOO, we will accept a *simple majority* decision of the following form:

Any eligible voter may author a “shutdown” petition. This will be a pre-vetted petition with a specific, fixed wording. Should the petition reach ballot stage (by acquiring the usual signature threshold), a vote will be held to decide whether LambdaMOO should be shut down. If the number of YES (we should shut down) votes equals or exceeds the number of NO (we should not shut down) votes received, LambdaMOO will be shut down after an 8-week grace period. (Note, only one “shutdown” petition may be active at a time.)

Shutdown petitions will be implemented at the earliest opportunity.

4. The New Direction

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We hope that LambdaMOO will become a more dynamic and enjoyable place for the wizards and the players. We do not want to discourage lively debate or to deprive players of a voice, and we encourage all of you to develop new ideas, mechanisms, and social policies, so as to minimize the need for direct wizardly social intervention as much as possible.

The Wizards of LambdaMOO