strategy gamers bark about how they lost
sleep last night playing “just one more turn,”
and shooter class put
in exhaustive hours of “training,”
but we all know that RPG fans get
more obsessed with their games
than anyone. Maybe it’s the inher-
ent escapism offered by heroic
adventures in virtual worlds, or
maybe it’s the incredibly addict-
nature of RPG character
development systems. Whatever
the reason, many gamers spend
dozens of hours a week immersed
in RPGs. One of the things I love
most about them is that you can
often literally spend months play-
ing one without seeing everything
it has to offer.

But RPG fans also seem more
prone toward unhealthy obses-
sions with their games, to the
point of losing all sense of per-
spective and balance in their lives.
The advent of MMOs has only
exacerbated that phenomenon,
since MMOs are crafted prima-
lly to reward gamers for putting
in time, rather than rewarding
skills, to encourage people to keep
shelling out monthly subscription
fees. It’s not uncommon for MMO
subscribers to play for more than
five hours a day on average, for
months at a time. To reach the
highest ranks of the PvP honor
system in World of Warcraft,
some players consistently play
for more than 10 hours a day.
When EverQuest (then dubbed
“EverCrack”) was the dominant
MMO, Sony Online found itself
threatened with lawsuits from the
families of addicted players. The
totalitarian communist regime
of China went so far as to introduce
a law requiring MMOs to penalize
players who played for more than
three consecutive hours. (Yeah,
somebody always goes too far for
the “greater good.”)

While some players definitely
act nutty and unhealthy, most
“obsessive” fans enjoy spending
their leisure time playing RPGs
simply because it’s a passionate
hobby. They even develop strong
friendships with people they don’t
know outside of the game and
play out real-life rituals in the
game world; in-game marriages
and funerals aren’t uncommon.
Recently, some fans have even
held virtual funerals in honor of
other players’ real-world deaths.
We reported on one such funeral
in our last issue (“Massacre in
Winterspring,” PGC July 2006).

It’s a strange phenomenon, and
one that a lot of people may feel
crosses into the aforementioned
“nuty and unhealthy” territory,
but memorializing obsessive RPG
fans within a game isn’t new. My
buddy Bill “Lord Brine” Drury
was a regular contributor to many
RPG forums during the late 1990s,
http://pc gamer. gamesradar.com

A far more serene funeral service held for a Chinese player in World of Warcraft.

The Serenity Now Guild gets medieval on the attendees of a virtual funeral in World of Warcraft. Download and watch the full event at Google Video: http://vide o.google.com/videoplay?docid=-7671946859765736668q=World+of+warcraft

and when he died, RPG fans lobbied developers to include memo-
rials to Lord Brine within their
games. As a result, there’s a Lord
Brine tombstone outside Britain
in Ultima IX: Ascension; a Lord
Brine tomb in the Ravensho
area of Might & Magic VIII; a Lord
Brine grave in Deus Ex; and Lord
Brine’s ashes entombed west of
Seyda Neen in Morrowind. I guess
having your death reflected is the
ultimate step into the game for an
obsessive RPG player.

As we reported last month,
Alliance guild Serenity Now
recently crashed a virtual funeral
held in World of Warcraft and
massacred all of the attending
Horde characters. I submit that
the vitriol leveled at them since
is completely misguided. Serenity
Now broke no game rules—in
fact, they actually roleplayed the
event to its fullest. By staging a
funeral in a contested zone and
opting to have their characters
attend unarmed, the mourners set
themselves up for one of the most
memorable role-playing events
in MMO history. That’s arguably
giving the greatest memorial pos-
sible to the RPG fan on whom the
event was focused.