

# MARTOR



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Title: "Internet café"

Author: Șerban Anghelescu

How to cite this article: Șerban, Anghelescu. 2005. "Internet café". *Martor* 10: 177-181.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: <http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/martor-10-2005/>

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## Internet café

**Tudor Anghelescu, 28 years old  
and Mihai Melinescu, 28 years old**  
Interview done by Șerban Anghelescu



Back at the Internet Café where we used to play all day long, you know, where I pushed the alarm button when we had that Chinaman situation, there everybody had weird names and nobody knew the others' real names, all we knew were their nicknames: I am Monk. Then there's Padre, the Lieutenant, K1 and a certain Chinaman, a huge guy, a lot bigger than me (the chap in question weighs 127 kilos) who was dead drunk that night and had started kicking the computers and scared the daylights out of a poor youngster who had just been employed, I'm sure you know the type: the "mechanic" who turns on the computer and takes your money at the end, as he's also the administrator. We mocked at him by calling him the DJ.

I like those nicknames. Why a "mechanic"? Because when your computer broke, you would start cursing and yell, "Mechanic, come and fix it!" A computer has nothing mechanical in it of course. We often play on the Internet, and the players are from all over the country, and sometimes from abroad. Your Internet server is not in Bucharest but in Buzău or in some other city or even abroad. Our partners were the two, three, four, five guys in the café and others all over the country. You access the Internet and you get a list of all the players who have nicknames, one weirder and crazier than the next, and it's only normal that after countless hours of playing to-

gether you get to know them all. During the game we can communicate with each other in writing. Those who have been kicked out of the game temporarily are dead, as it were, and until the next round they can write to each other. They write messages. People greet each other in a number of very interesting ways. When you join the game you have to greet everybody with either a "Hi" or with a "Re" (from "respect"). They are all in English. When I used to play, I was a legend among the kids 'cause I played well and whenever I rode my bike down Dorobanți Boulevard or past Caragiale High School, I would hear, "Re, Monk!" When we meet each other in the street we call each other by our nicknames simply because we don't know the others' real names. I only recently found out that Gaijin, for instance, is a medical student. Another guy, "Le grand séraphin", is a professional singer. Then there's Montela Lonely Killer who works at Biomedica medical centre. Most of them don't play at home. They usually gather at a café. There's a chap with a Pharaoh's name, Akhenaton, who plays at home.

The game is one of *counter-strike* and it's based on getting the others in trouble and on pissing them off. It's a team game and you can create a strategy or you can simply play it, as you please. It is a game in which you basically blow off some steam, meaning that to get to pull the

trigger of the machine gun a lot, there's blood everywhere, man, it's so cool! There are terrorists and anti-terrorists crammed up in tiny locations, but in the general mayhem we still have a goal: get a good score, meaning killing as many enemies as you can and staying alive for as long as you can. Apart from this, there were some pretty glorious moments, moments when the way your team had worked together and the manner in which you eventually killed the bloody bastard in that virtual space would lead to standing ovations. The team included only strangers, people who had never met, but they all played for the same team. When you die, the team continues to play to the last man. Even if you're dead, you can still see the team. You see through some other player's eyes, usually somebody you choose. At the end, when there's only one left, the dead men's team places its last hope on the still living member, and if this guy works miracles and kills all the enemies, thus winning the game for the whole team, he gets standing ovations and congratulations and so on. Some people are calm, understanding and tolerant but there are others who curse and call you foul names. Or they kick your ass during the game. There's always at least one game administrator, meaning a guy with unlimited power who can kick you out, give you privileges and one of the possible punishments is public humiliation. He can also give you a "slap", meaning exactly what you hear: he grabs you, holds you up in the air and starts slapping you until you find yourself lying half dead in a corner. These games are really funny. And they represent an entire world! Talking about Gai-jin, who's a medical student, I am a journalist and an amateur musician, the other is a professional musician, but there are also many players with a rather dubious character, all bloody jerks.

Bozgoru is a huge man whose job is to be sick, meaning that he thought to himself that he must be sick since he felt like kicking everybody's butts. He used to tell me how he had beaten up people, and he would say, "Man, I beat

the hell out of them, I punched the daylights out of the bastards but I liked their attitude: they fought back. What I like in the fight is to see that the others fight back". He was involved in I don't know how many law suits. I watched *Jesus of Nazareth* when it was released. The people at the café, as they knew I was kind of good at theological stuff, thought I was a priest. I would explain to them that I wasn't but they wouldn't understand. That was one of the reasons why they respected me; the other was because they rarely escaped unscathed from a night's game. Some of them had a good heart, like Bozgoru, for instance, who despite his huge body had the mind of a newly born babe. As I was watching the film, a Gypsy boy passed by and suddenly asked, "Why are they beating him up like that? Who is he?" Bozgoru turned round and said, "What are you, nuts? Haven't you heard of Jesus Christ? That's Jesus Christ over there". "I had no idea".

They are all great. People in your generation (the interviewer's generation, n.n.) couldn't have been so weird and completely detached from reality. We couldn't have got together. Under normal circumstances people like us could not get in touch with one another, yet when we play we are all the same. When he looks at me he sees a soldier and when I look at him I see a soldier too. The guys in Buzău decided to meet those in Bucharest and came down here by car. Some of them are 30 or 40. The game proper is rather stupid, there's no story to it: it's like playing cops and robbers. Imagine that all you have are four or five streets, not more, and you can't get any further 'cause you run into walls. There are two bases. We meet in middle ground and we shoot at each other or we have to rescue some hostages or they have to place a bomb in our base. The game is between two teams with no more than nine members each, one round lasts three minutes and people play for hours. Your virtual character, the one you see on the screen is no Prince Charming, he doesn't evolve and he doesn't get any better, there's no progress. But you can get better after using the mouse and the keyboards

for a long time. There are games where characters do evolve, they get faster and better. The Americans came up with the vocabulary for the game. I can give you tons of abbreviations which are all very cool. Take for instance *evilol*. The particle *lol* means *letting out load* and there's another reaction that almost won't let you write "*rofl: rolling on the floor laughing*". If I'm in *evil*, it means that I have malicious intentions. Many things in *counter-strike* gave birth to Romanian words. There's for instance "apăsac" (a *pusher*). The "pusher" is the dumb head who, instead of firing short bursts of gunfire, simply presses "shot", the gun goes up, and he doesn't aim properly, he just keeps shooting like there's no tomorrow. Then you hear screams and yells, if there're two or three team members in the same café, "Go over there and shoot him; hold the bridge". The American military command *go, go, go* turned into *g. g.*, meaning "*very well, excellent*". At the end of the round, if I played well, all team members tell me, "*g. g., Monk*". When you are killed, you wait until your team members are either victorious, or they get killed themselves. Then you start a new game. The weapons you use are incredibly varied, from the simplest pistol to Kalashnikovs, M4s or rifles with a gun sighting telescope. There are *snipers* in the game and this gives birth to all sort of funny expressions, like "Mr. Sniper". When you kill somebody from behind, that's called "*la sapanache*". Being a *camper* is embarrassing because a *camper* cheats, hides away, watches but doesn't play, hides behind walls and is often punished. A *head-shot* is the most glorious moment because you get to shoot your opponent in the head or you kill him with a knife.

Dying by the knife is the greatest shame imaginable, they all laugh at you. There are some absolutely delicious situations when there are just two players left, one from each team, and they write messages to each other to decide where to meet on the map and then they fight only with their knives. It's very beautiful. Why is



it such a shame to be killed with a knife? Because more often than not you have earphones on and you can hear the others coming. You must be a complete idiot to hear somebody's footsteps next to you and to still do nothing.

It's all a matter of reflex and of speed in this game. It's like in a 19<sup>th</sup> century duel: who pulls the trigger first lives. There is another strange thing going on sometimes, meaning that when we play together I sometimes have astronomical scores, a lot higher than my abilities would allow, while his scores are low, or vice versa, and at the end of the evening – actually, it is more like 7 in the morning – we make an assessment: the game was good or it was bad, and do you remember when I killed that guy? This game was wonderful precisely because it helped us make

friends with people whom we would have never met otherwise. We can't see them regularly, we don't go out for a cup of coffee and we don't meet in the street for a friendly chat. The game is the only common ground we have, there's nothing else to give us something to talk about. I met Serafim at Vama Veche. I was in pub, minding my own business, when I heard desperate yells, "Lieutenant Monk!" It was Serafim, dead drunk, and he was shocked to see that I was wearing American military fatigues, while he was all in white like an Arab sheik. Talking about dressing up at Vama Veche, I heard a kid telling his mom when he saw us riding our bikes, "Look, mommy, the Americans and the Arabs are friends again!"

On the evening of December 29<sup>th</sup> we got together to play. We spent hours playing until we were simply famished. There are a couple of kids whom we nicknamed "darts". A "dart" is a kid who darts out of the café and runs round the corner, on Calea Floreasca, to buy you a shaorma. That's all you can get at that hour. You give them a 5000 lei tip or a kick in the ass. Internet is really cheap, you pay by the hour or you get an eight-hour pack with a discount. A "mechanic" wanted to borrow my bike for a kid who'd get him something to eat. I hate lending my bike. They all admire us for our bikes and they all know they're expensive. In the minds of the people around us our bikes are actually two or three times more expensive than they really are. They even asked if my bike was worth 5000 euros. In fact, it's worth only 2000.

It was a cold, rainy night and Mihai said that he'd lend him his bike. We all gave him some money, he got on the bike and off he rode. It was pretty dark in that Internet café so I couldn't see the kid's face very well. I didn't know him at all, but we trusted Pescaru' (*The Fisherman*), the "mechanic". We had known him for a long time because he lived in the neighbourhood. The kid took the bike, collected money from guys there, rode into the night and never came back. We waited for half an hour, then we waited another

15 minutes, and the guys there started making fun of us, "he stole your bike, man". Mihai took my bike and went to look for the kid. It was raining cats and dogs outside. I went down to the shaorma stall and asked the Arab guy there – he's a friend of mine – if he had seen anything. He hadn't. I went down Calea Floreasca, I reached two restaurants that were still open and still nothing. I ran into a police car. They hadn't seen anything either. I gave them my card, told them my name and asked them to give me a call if they saw anything. They recognized my name and they said "alright, we'll go but it's rather late". Later on I took a ride myself and found nothing. I went to the 1<sup>st</sup> police precinct on Ana Ipătescu Boulevard that night. Then, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December, there was no one at the precinct to solve emergencies, be they rape or murder. Not a human soul.

The next morning we went there together. For quite a while I thought that the "mechanic" had been in cahoots with the kid who took our bike, especially because the thief and Pescaru' had both been released from prison in summer. I talked to Pescaru', who told us that indeed he had done time but he hadn't done anything. He had covered up for somebody else because the guy had a child. We first found the thief on the Internet 'cause he had a couple of websites with poems dedicated to his fat and ugly girlfriend. One website had his picture and a picture of him with the girls from ASIA. Next we went to the police and told them we had pictures of the guy and a website. They said that they couldn't access the Internet: "We have a computer but we don't have an Internet connection". We printed the photos, took them back to the police and told them, "We have his and his girlfriend's names, his girlfriend's phone number and we know that he was released from Jilava or Rahova State Prisons this summer. Go ahead and find him!" "We just can't find him like that. If you can get us an ID number or something ..." We even knew his birth date and his zodiac sign because he had posted his personal data on the In-



ternet site: his birthday, his sign, his favourite colour and his favourite flower. “We can’t find him”. This still happens even if there are loads of computers out there and you can search for all kind of stuff according to various criteria.

When we finally took him down to the precinct, everybody there recognized him instantly because they had caught him the first time. Almost a month later I got a phone call from a very nice guy, whom we had almost bribed. He washes cars and sells flowers, he’s almost homeless and we call him Sato. Sato had said that he would help us find the thief. A month after he called Mihai: “look, I’m here at the florist’s across the street from Nick’s on Dorobanți, you come quickly ‘cause our man is here too”. I was nearby, at the bike workshop. Two other cyclists came along. When a bike is stolen, all other cyclists help you find it; it’s like with taxi drivers, they all stick together. My men were twins dressed in Mountain Bike gear, meaning chest armour, shoulder pads and protective gear for their elbows and hands. We got there, caught the creep, kicked him in the face – he was so terrified that he wet his pants; the thought of touching him almost made me throw up - , made him kneel, tied his legs with my belt and asked Sato for some rope with which we tied up his hands and left him lying there, face down. We called the police and told them: “we want a car immediately across the street from Nick’s on Dorobanți”. “What happened?” “There’s been a theft and we caught the thief”. “What’s your name?” “Anghelescu”, I said. And that was it. The car came down immediately and a couple of civilians got off. They were amazed to discover

that it was all about a bike stolen not two minutes before, but a month before. They took him down to the precinct, and we followed on our bikes and remained there until ten in the evening. At first, the guy refused to tell whom he had sold the bike to. The cops were nice and they gave him some cigarettes. They were all very calm. They discovered that the accused had also stolen a cell phone and one other bike. The jerk lived in an underground flat, two doors away from Mihai. They took him to the prosecutor’s office and then released him on the grounds of his not being dangerous. Seeing that the law wouldn’t solve our problem, we made some phone calls and I eventually met a guy in front of the police precinct. He had been recommended to us. He got off a red Matiz so I thought that we couldn’t have got ourselves a worse help. We went back to the precinct, entered the chief’s office and I saw the man suddenly standing up. What I had seen in 80s films was happening before my eyes in the 90s reality. The chief called a subordinate officer, gave him some orders and the man said, “Yessir! The bike was sold”. The thief admitted having sold it to a man selling apples at Obor Market and that he got 1 million lei for it (approximately 200 euros). The bike was actually worth 1 000 euros. The apple merchant wouldn’t admit anything and refused to come to the precinct and ... that was all, things ended there.

*Translated by Alina Popescu*