



Tired of Zoom parties? Hang out in the virtual world with these online games

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Zoom, Google Meet and other video conferencing platforms have become the hottest applications of 2020. But they have also transformed our social hangouts to formal meetings. While that was indeed the main purpose of such apps, it's not always fun to have hour-long conversations with your friends while just staring at the faces on the screen. Enter virtual worlds.

Online Town

Online Town is an application with two-dimensional 8-bit graphics that also allows video chats but is more gamified. Users can enter a private room with their friends and navigate an 8-bit avatar around inside. You can even control multiple separate video chats at the same time. The application sends the video and audio directly to your peers instead of sending them to the site's server, leaving lesser room for security concerns. The app currently comes with 6 maps and a few small options, but people have already started hosting college reunions and other hangouts here. With time the founders plan to introduce newer and more interactive gamified options into the platform.

Animal Crossing: New Horizons

Price: \$60-80

This year Nintendo has taken the world by storm with the new edition of

Animal Crossing. And its multiplayer functionalities coupled with the unique features of the game truly make gamers feel like they are living out a whole different life inside this virtual world. You can visit friends running their own towns or islands, invite them over to yours and have entirely customized social hangouts. People have had dates, graduations and even got married inside this game! It's a bummer you can't hold video chats here and another downside is that the game is exclusive to Nintendo Switch only. Nevertheless, it has grown into one of the most popular virtual worlds in this pandemic.

GTA Online

Price: \$20

GTA online is the online version of the video game GTA V. Set in the fictional state of San Andreas, the game offers a ton of stuff for players to enjoy with their friends. Players can purchase property, set

up their own businesses, run a night club, or work as a freelance secret agent for the government. The two limiting factors to this game is the steep grind for money and the fact the game extensive gunplay mechanics means public servers can get quite chaotic. If you want to avoid that however, the game has multiple dedicated roleplay server where players can play as whatever they want without taking a missile to the face.

Besides these, games such as Final Fantasy and World of Warcraft also provide interactive virtual worlds. Fans of the Star Wars can also check out Star Wars: The Old Republic while for Star Trek Fans there is Star Trek Online. India's Hike messenger app is also working on a virtual world called Hike Land. With the increasing number of interactive options in the virtual worlds, the days of social hangouts on video conferencing apps may very well be coming to an end.