

# Virtual sledding

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The latest Internet addiction is a stick-figure sledder in a beanie and a scarf who takes off, expressionless, down whatever hill you draw. His life is in your hands, and the first, oh, thousand times you play, he will die, die, die.



Which might well be the secret behind Line Rider, a deceptively simple online game that has drawn more than 11 million views at deviantART.com since it was posted Sept. 23 by Slovenian art student Boštjan Cadež.

The tiny tobogganist manages to be adorable, with his red-and-white scarf and bland, blind faith in you, the master of his fate, the person drawing the lines that will keep his sled moving, crash him or shoot him into space, to freefall forever, or until you log off. Talk about a rescue complex.

It hit the top of the Internet charts, so to speak, in mid-October, among the fastest-gaining Google queries for two weeks, according to Google Zeitgeist, which tracks Web traffic.

“The scale of it is mindboggling to me,” said Cadež. “People tell me of whole schools playing with it until the page gets banned.”

He dreamed up the idea in primary school and forgot about it. Then not long ago, the industrial arts student, 27, from Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, came across one of his old sketchbooks, featuring a big slope with a little sledder on the top. “It’s taken over my life,” he says. He’s working on a new version to be released in December.

It has spawned imitators, blogs, and grabbed a chunk of YouTube.com. Addicts draw elaborate Line Rider tracks, record them and post them to the videosharing site. Searching YouTube for Line Rider generates nearly 4,000 hits, including Line Rider Extreme; Pro; Flips; Ultimate Flip; Fishy; Gravity Zero; Halfpipe; Ultimate and Nightmare.

The videos are a testament to human ingenuity: Line Rider has jumped a shark, been eaten by fish and escaped death in a helicopter. He’s spelunked, jumped off a roof, shot through tunnels, over bridges and into canyons.

Belgian Web developer Steven Wittens, 22, created the popular “Jagged Peak Adventure,” set to music from the Japanese anime series Cowboy Bebop. It’s been viewed more than 700,000 times.

“The first time you play, the character will certainly fall off the sled, helplessly flailing his arms as he falls to his doom. Your first instinct is to try again and before you know it you’ve spent an hour drawing nothing but lines,” says Wittens, who works for a company based in Vancouver, where he will be moving next month.

Brett Hurban, 25, an Ohio database developer, spent six hours drafting his “Line Rider Helicopter Escape,” which has been viewed more than 500,000 times.

“It’s something nice and simple but allows complex designs. It kind of forces creativity,” Hurban says.

Cadež says Line Rider was a class assignment.

“It’s not a game, it’s a toy. What I mean is there are no goals to (achieve) and there is no score,” he wrote on deviantART.

Kind of like tobogganing. Or life.