

# **WHY GAMES NEED GAMES STUDIES**

**2<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL POSTGRADUATE GAMES CONFERENCE**

**BRUNEL UNIVERSITY**

16<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2008

PROF. RICHARD A. **BARTLE**

UNIVERSITY OF **ESSEX**

## INTRODUCTION

- TODAY, I'M GOING TO OUTLINE WHY THE COMPUTER GAMES **INDUSTRY** NEEDS COMPUTER GAMES **RESEARCH**
- YES, THIS **IS** A TRANSPARENT ATTEMPT TO MAKE YOU FEEL WANTED!
- HOWEVER, YOU ACTUALLY **ARE** WANTED, SO IT'S ALL OK!
- THE ONLY PROBLEM IS THAT NOT EVERYONE **REALISES** THIS...

## CONSTITUENCIES

- (COMPUTER) GAMES STUDIES ADDRESSES A NUMBER OF **CONSTITUENCIES**
  - THE GAMES **INDUSTRY**
  - **GOVERNMENT**
  - OTHER **ACADEMIC** DISCIPLINES
  - YOUR OWN **PERSONAL** INTERESTS
    - YOU **KNOW** YOU HAVE THEM!
- IN CLASSIC **LECTURER** STYLE, I'M GOING TO GO THROUGH THESE **ONE BY ONE**
- WARNING: THIS IS SOMEWHAT **CYNICAL...**

## BEAR CUBS FIGHTING



## INDUSTRY

- THE GAMES INDUSTRY **TRADITIONALLY** VIEWS UNIVERSITIES AS **TRAINING ESTABLISHMENTS**
  - THEY WANT **US** TO TRAIN **THEIR** EMPLOYEES
- THEY SEE **NO** REASON WHY THEY SHOULD **CONTRIBUTE** IN ANY WAY TOWARDS THIS
- THEY TELL US **EXACTLY** WHAT THEY WANT, THEN COMPLAIN **BITTERLY** WHEN WE **GIVE** THEM IT
- OH, AND WE'RE **OUT OF TOUCH**, TOO!

## GOVERNMENT

- A LOT OF GAMES RESEARCH IS PROMPTED BY **GOVERNMENT CONCERNS**
  - WHICH IS TO SAY, **TABLOID NEWSPAPER CONCERNS**
- THIS RESEARCH TENDS TO BE ABOUT **ADDICTION, VIOLENCE, CHILDREN** AND ... WELL, THAT'S ABOUT **IT**
- LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF GAMES IS **NOT** REGARDED AS AN IMPEDIMENT
- RESEARCH WILL CONTINUE UNTIL IT PRODUCES THE **RIGHT** ANSWER...

## ACADEMIA

- GAMES ARE **COOL** AND HIP AND **TRENDY**
- **ALL** OTHER ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES ARE **MIND-NUMBING STODGE**
- IDEA! WHY NOT **COMBINE** GAMES WITH EDUCATION OR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE OR **PSYCHOLOGY** OR ECONOMICS?
  - HMM, YOU'RE NOT A **GAMER**, ARE YOU?
- BECAUSE THEN YOU GET **COOL AND HIP AND TRENDY MIND-NUMBING STODGE**, THAT'S WHY NOT!

## YOUR OWN INTERESTS

- YOU STUDY GAMES BECAUSE YOU **LIKE** GAMES
  - YES, YOU HAVE A **DOZEN** EXPLANATIONS AS TO WHY THIS ISN'T THE CASE, BUT YOU'RE **LYING**
- YOU **DO** LIKE GAMES. YOU **LOVE** THEM!
  - IF NOT, CHANGE YOUR RESEARCH FIELD **NOW!**
- BUT GAMES ARE **FUN** AND THEREFORE **SHAMEFUL!** THEY'RE **NOT SERIOUS**
  - EVEN **SERIOUS GAMES** AREN'T SERIOUS
- SAYING YOU LIKE **GAMES** IS TREATED AS IF A CRIMINOLOGIST SAID THEY LIKED **CRIME**



## RANT RECOVERY

- OK, SO THOSE ARE THE **STEREOTYPES**
- FORTUNATELY, THINGS ARE **CHANGING**
- COMPUTER GAMES ARE **GROWING UP**
  - IN PART BECAUSE **PLAYERS** ARE GROWING UP
- GAMES' **PROBLEMS** STEMMED FROM FEELINGS OF **INFERIORITY** COMPARED TO RELATED FORMS
  - LITERATURE, **FILM**, THEATRE, ...
- BUT NOW, THEY'RE ACQUIRING **LEGITIMACY**

ACTAEON & ARTEMIS



# OPHELIA



## INDUSTRY

- THE GAMES INDUSTRY **NEEDS** GAME RESEARCH AND INCREASINGLY **KNOWS** IT NEEDS IT
- NOT **JUST** ON THE TECHNICAL SIDE
  - A FACT WHICH **STILL** ISN'T ALWAYS RECOGNISED
  - DEVELOPERS SEEM TO **LIKE** REINVENTING WHEELS
    - EXCEPT WHEN IT COMES TO WRITING **DATABASES**, OBVIOUSLY...
- **DESIGNERS** WANT RESEARCH ON GAMES AS **GAMES**
  - IT ALLOWS THEM TO **SPEAK** ABOUT WHAT THEY DO

## EXAMPLE

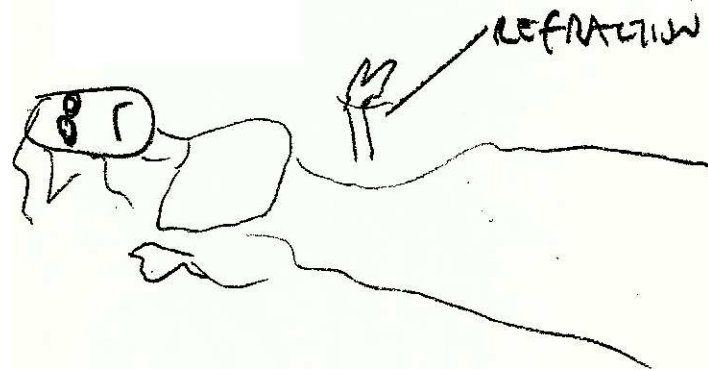
- TAKE MY OWN FIELD, WHICH IS ... **WHAT?**
- I'M INTERESTED IN THE KIND OF THING EXEMPLIFIED BY: *WORLD OF WARCRAFT, SECOND LIFE, EVE ONLINE, LAMB DAMOO, CLUB PENGUIN, AGE OF CONAN, LINEAGE 2, MAPLE STORY, ...*
- WHAT'S IT **CALLED?**
  - THERE ARE GAME WORLDS, SOCIAL WORLDS, SOME 3D, SOME 2.5D, THERE'S 2D, THERE'S TEXT
- WITHOUT THE **VOCABULARY**, WHAT'S SIMILAR CAN BE TREATED AS **DISSIMILAR**

## UNUSUAL

- COMPARED TO **OTHER** CREATIVE INDUSTRIES, GAMES ARE VERY **UNUSUAL**
- **LITERATURE**: ACADEMICS READ NOVELS AND INTERPRET WHAT THE **NOVELLIST** IS SAYING
- **GAMES**: ACADEMICS READ GAMES AND INTERPRET WHAT THE **DESIGNER** IS SAYING
- **THEN** THE DESIGNER READS WHAT THE **ACADEMIC** SAID AND ASSIMILATES IT
- EXAMPLE: **HERO'S JOURNEY** STORYLINES

## GOVERNMENT

- TWO **MAJOR** GAMES-RELATED INTER-GOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCES ARE COMING UP
  - INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM AND MEETING OF OECD
- THE UK GOVERNMENT CAN'T HARP ON ABOUT **ADDICTION, VIOLENCE AND CHILDREN** WHEN NEGOTIATING REGULATIONS ON **IP, TAX AND FREEDOM OF SPEECH**
- CAN **DEVELOPERS** ADVISE ON THIS?
- **NO** – BUT **ACADEMICS** CAN (AND, INDEED, **HAVE DONE AND ARE DOING**)



- IF I WANT TO **TEACH** USING A **PICTURE** AND I **CAN'T DRAW**, I SHOULD GET AN **ARTIST**
- IF I WANT TO TEACH USING A **GAME** AND I **CAN'T DESIGN**, I SHOULD GET A **DESIGNER**



## ART OF GAMES DESIGN

- FOR EDUCATIONAL GAMES, YOU NEED PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND **BOTH** EDUCATION **AND** GAMES
- EDUCATORS WOULD **LAUGH** IF A GAME DESIGNER CREATED A **LEARNING** SYSTEM USING A RIDICULOUSLY **NAÏVE** PEDAGOGY
- YET THEY WONDER **WHY** GAME DESIGNERS LAUGH AT THE GAMES **THEY** CREATE
- **NOW**, THOUGH, EDUCATORS ARE GETTING DESIGNERS **INVOLVED** IN SERIOUS GAMES
- LIKEWISE FOR **OTHER** FIELDS, *EG.* ECONOMICS

# MT BARTLE-FRERE



## YOUR OWN INTERESTS

- WHY IS IT OK TO STUDY GAMES?
- OK? **OK?! IT'S MORE** THAN OK! IT'S ABSOLUTELY **TERRIFIC!**
- PLAYING GAMES IS AMONG THE MOST **IMPORTANT** THINGS HUMAN BEINGS **DO**
- FAR FROM BEING SOME **NEW**, JOHNNY-COME-LATELY CULTURAL **FAD**, GAMES **PREDATE** CULTURE
- **ANIMALS** PLAY GAMES
- EAT **THAT**, LITERATURE!

## VINDICATION

- IT'S ONLY WITH THE ADVENT OF COMPUTERS THAT THE **SIGNIFICANCE** OF GAMES HAS GRADUALLY BECOME **RECOGNISED**
- THIS MEANS THERE IS A TRULY **VAST**, UNEXPLORED TERRITORY OUT THERE
- YOU PEOPLE ARE THE **PIONEERS!** **YOU** GET TO OPEN IT UP! **YOU** GET TO BE FIRST TO SEE ITS **WONDERS!**
- AND BECAUSE DESIGNERS **LISTEN**, YOU GET TO **CHANGE** WHAT YOU SEE, TOO!

## CONCLUSION

- NOW IS A **MARVELLOUS** TIME TO BE STUDYING COMPUTER GAMES – FOR **WHATEVER** REASON
- THE OLD WALLS ARE CRUMBLING, AND THE **GLORIOUS** VISTAS THEY HID ARE WAITING TO BE REVEALED
  - **YOU** GET TO REVEAL THEM
  - **YOU** GET TO BE FIRST TO **UNDERSTAND** THEM
  - **YOU** GET THEORIES **NAMED** AFTER YOU
- BUT MOST **IMPORTANT** OF ALL, YOU GET TO PLAY THE **BETTER GAMES** THAT RESULT!