

# WHY PEOPLE PLAY IN VIRTUAL WORLDS

**SEMINAR**

5<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2003

**DR RICHARD A. BARTLE**

VISITING **PRINCIPAL FELLOW**

## INTRODUCTION

- THE **COMPUTER GAMES** COURSE HERE AT ESSEX IS STILL **BOOTING UP**
  - WE HAVE **ONE** 3<sup>RD</sup>-YEAR STUDENT AT PRESENT
- OUR FOCUS IS **INTERNET** COMPUTER GAMES
  - PARTICULARLY **VIRTUAL WORLDS**
- IN **LAST** YEAR'S SEMINAR I DESCRIBED SOME OF THE **TECHNICAL** ISSUES INVOLVED
  - AFTER ALL, THIS IS AN **ENGINEERING** DEPARTMENT

HOWEVER...

- IN MANY WAYS COMPUTER GAMES ARE MORE *Art* THAN *Science*
  - AND I **DON'T** MEAN THE **PRETTY PICTURES**
- HOW DO THEY RELATE TO **YOUR** SPECIALITY?
- THIS SEMINAR IS AN **HONEST EFFORT** TO SHOW YOU WHAT YOU'VE TAKEN ON BOARD
- IT'S UP TO **YOU** TO DECIDE WHETHER TO **EMBRACE IT, TOLERATE IT OR RUN SCREAMING** FROM THE ROOM

TO THIS END...

- TODAY I'LL BE TALKING ABOUT **WHY** PEOPLE PLAY IN VIRTUAL WORLDS
- THIS IS AT THE **CUTTING EDGE** OF VIRTUAL WORLD DESIGN
  - THERE'S **NOTHING** BEYOND THIS AT PRESENT
- IT'S ABOUT AS **FAR REMOVED** FROM ELECTRONIC ENGINEERING AS IT **GETS**
  - AND SHOWS HOW **MUCH/LITTLE** VW RESEARCH HAS PROGRESSED
- SUBTEXT: IF YOU CAN **STAND THIS**, YOU CAN STAND **ANYTHING** VWS HAVE TO THROW AT YOU!

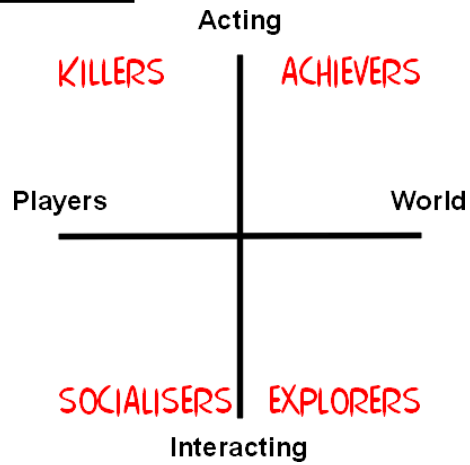
#### CONTENT BEGINS HERE..!

- HOW DO YOU FIND OUT WHY PEOPLE PLAY IN VIRTUAL WORLDS?
  - EASY! YOU **ASK** THEM!
- AND **WHAT** DO THEY REPLY?
  - “Because it’s fun!”
- OK... SO YOU ASK THEM SOME **MORE**, AND SOME **MORE**, AND SOME **MORE**...
- ...UNTIL **EVENTUALLY** YOU DISCOVER THAT “FUN” MEANS **DIFFERENT THINGS** TO **DIFFERENT PEOPLE**

#### PLAYER TYPES

- HOWEVER, THERE AREN'T **ACTUALLY** ALL THAT MANY OF THESE “DIFFERENT THINGS”
- **FOUR** BASIC ACTIVITIES PEOPLE FIND FUN:
  - SCORING POINTS, LEVELLING UP – **ACHIEVERS**
  - TALKING TO PEOPLE, GOSSIPING – **SOCIALISERS**
  - EXPLORING THE GAME WORLD – **EXPLORERS**
  - DOMINATING OTHERS – **KILLERS**
- ACCEPTED NOW AS A **BASIC PARADIGM**
  - TAKE THE “BARTLE TEST” TO FIND OUT YOUR TYPE!

## PLAYER TYPES GRAPH



- HEARTS, CLUBS, DIAMONDS SPADES

## BALANCE

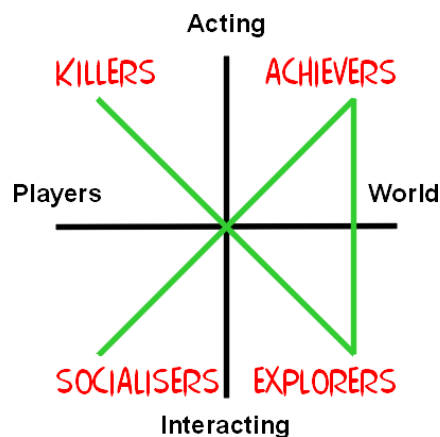
- THIS MODEL HAS **POWERFUL USES**
  - UNDERLYING INTER-TYPE **DYNAMICS** CAN BE USED TO **BALANCE** A VIRTUAL WORLD
  - EXAMPLE: KILLERS **DRIVE AWAY** SOCIALISERS
- FOUR **STEADY STATES**
  - ACHIEVER-DOMINATED
  - SOCIALISER-DOMINATED
  - EQUILIBRIUM BETWEEN ALL FOUR TYPES
  - EMPTY GAME...

### PROBLEMS

- TWO MAIN **FLAWS** IN THIS MODEL
- 1) SOME TYPES SEEM TO HAVE DISTINCT SUB-TYPES
  - **GRIEFERS** AND **POLITICIANS** BOTH COME UNDER **KILLERS**
- 2) PEOPLE **CHANGE** THEIR PLAYING STYLES OVER TIME
  - THIS HAS BEEN KNOWN SINCE **VERY** EARLY DAYS
  - TECHNICAL TERM IS **DRIFT**
  - EVENTUALLY, PEOPLE **DRIFT AWAY**

### MAIN SEQUENCE

- KILLER->EXPLORER->ACHIEVER->SOCIALISER



- **MAIN SEQUENCE** PATH

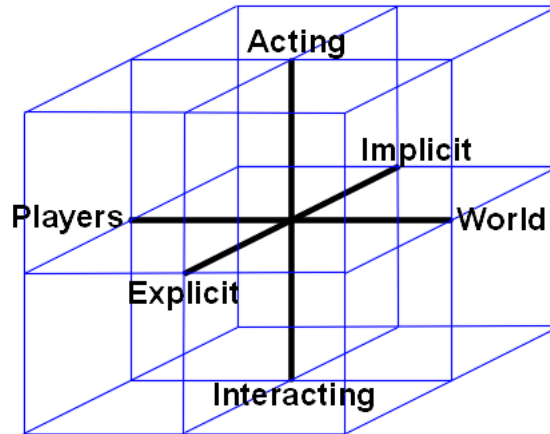
#### OTHER SEQUENCES

- UNFORTUNATELY THE MAIN SEQUENCE ISN'T THE **ONLY** SEQUENCE
  - SOME PLAYERS **OSCILLATE** KILLER/SOCIALISER
  - OTHERS OSCILLATE ACHIEVER/EXPLORER
  - SOME EVEN OSCILLATE ACHIEVER/SOCIALISER
- SEEMS TO SUGGEST THERE MAY BE A **THIRD** DIMENSION INVOLVED
  - BUT WHAT MIGHT THAT DIMENSION **BE**?

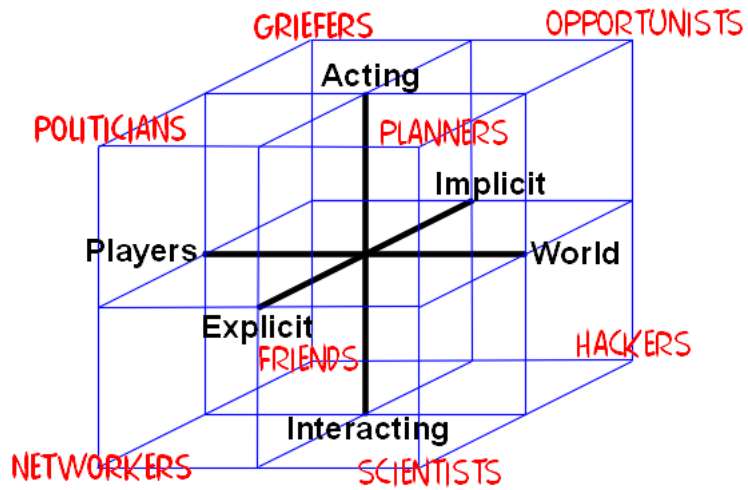
#### SOME HISTORY

- THE PLAYER TYPES MODEL, IS FOR **MORTALS**
  - REGULAR PLAYERS, THE **VAST** MAJORITY
- HOWEVER, I **ALSO** DID ONE FOR WIZZES
  - PRIVILEGED PLAYERS WHO HAVE "**WON**" THE GAME
  - **AKA** WIZARDS, ADMINS, GODS, SYSOPS...
- THIS SECOND MODEL REPLACED THE GAME/WORLD AXIS WITH AN **IMPLICIT/EXPLICIT** AXIS
  - OR EXECUTABLE/EXAMINABLE, CODE/DATA
- **MAYBE** THIS AXIS WOULD WORK HERE?

WELL, IT DOES...



LABELLING THE SUB-CUBES



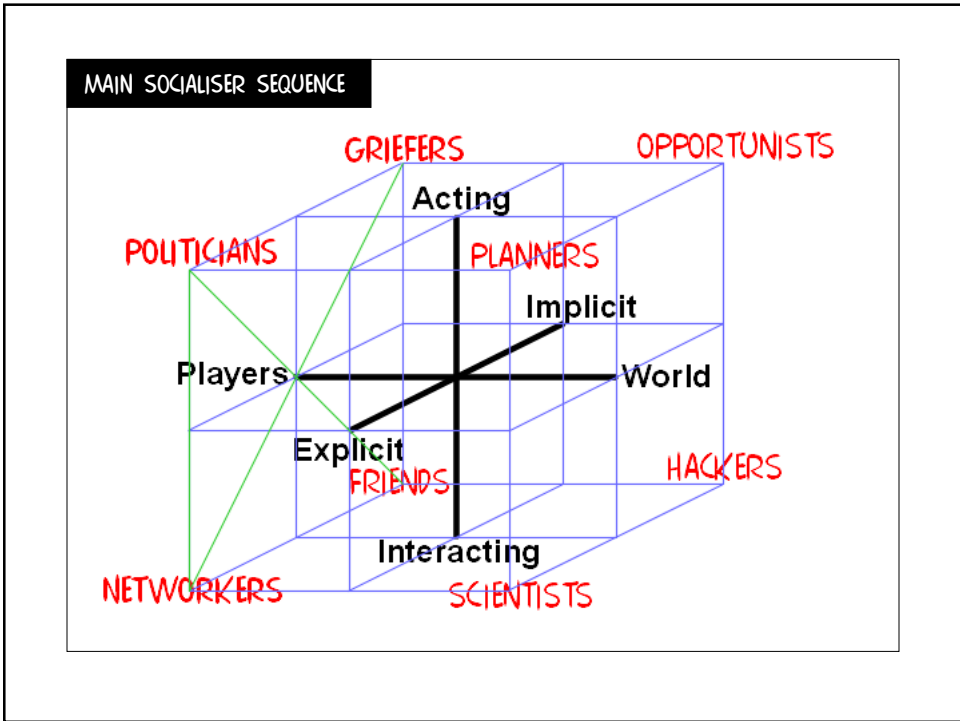
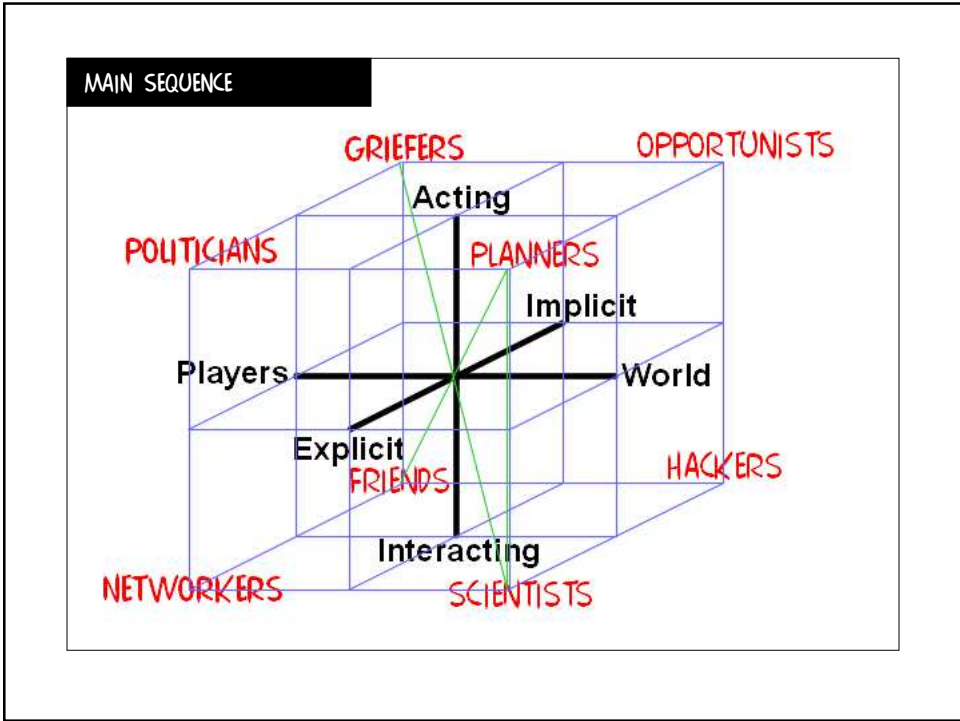
#### NEW TYPES

- WE GET **8** TYPES NOW INSTEAD OF **4**
- **ACHIEVERS**
  - OPPORTUNISTS & PLANNERS
- **SOCIALISERS**
  - NETWORKERS & FRIENDS
- **EXPLORERS**
  - SCIENTISTS & HACKERS
- **KILLERS**
  - POLITICIANS & GRIEFERS

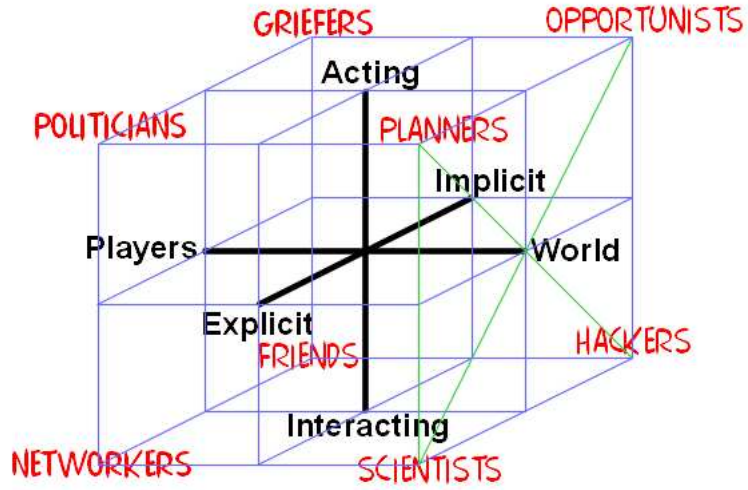
#### SEQUENCES

- THE FOUR SEQUENCES DESCRIBED EARLIER BECOME:
- **MAIN** SEQUENCE
  - GRIEFER->SCIENTIST->PLANNER->FRIEND
- MAIN **SOCIALISER** SEQUENCE
  - GRIEFER->NETWORKER->POLITICIAN->FRIEND
- MAIN **EXPLORER** SEQUENCE
  - OPPORTUNIST->SCIENTIST->PLANNER->HACKER
- **MINOR** SEQUENCE
  - OPPORTUNIST->NETWORKER->PLANNER->FRIEND

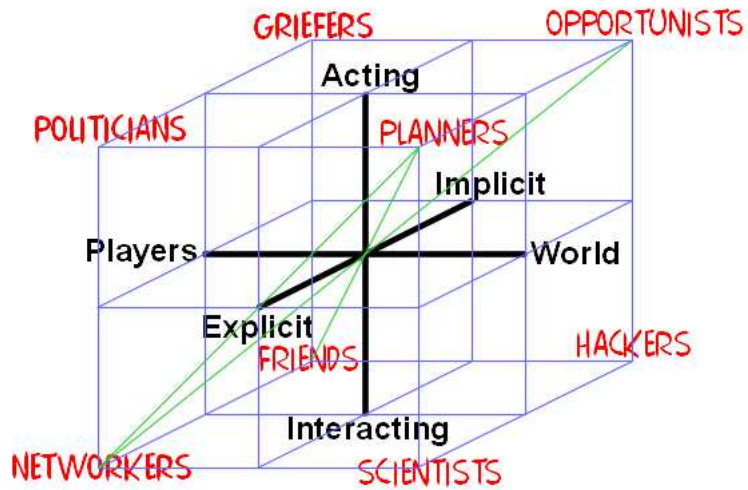




MAIN EXPLORER SEQUENCE

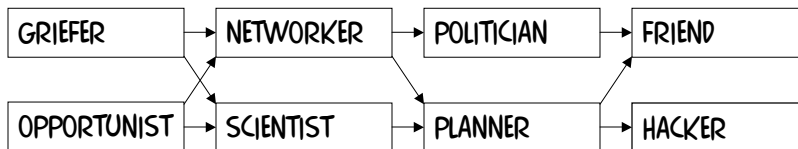


MINOR SEQUENCE



#### DEVELOPMENT TRACKS

- PEOPLE DO OCCASIONALLY SWITCH BETWEEN SEQUENCES, THOUGH
  - WHERE THEY INTERSECT
- WE CAN COMBINE THE SEQUENCES TO GIVE DEVELOPMENT TRACKS



- NOTE: POLITICIANS ARE ODDITIES...

#### GENERAL SEQUENCE

- PLAYERS START BY DETERMINING THE **BOUNDARIES** THAT GOVERN THEIR ACTIONS
- NEXT, THEY STRING TOGETHER **MEANINGFUL SEQUENCES** OF PRIMITIVE ACTIONS
- THEN THEY **APPLY** WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED
- UNTIL EVENTUALLY THEY **MASTER** IT AND IT BECOMES **SECOND NATURE**
- LOCATE->DISCOVER->APPLY->INTERNALISE
  - THRASH, KICK, TODDLE, WALK

#### THIS IS ALL VERY WELL...

- UNFORTUNATELY, IT DOESN'T ANSWER THE QUESTION
  - WHY **DO** PEOPLE PLAY VIRTUAL WORLDS?
- NEVERTHELESS, AS I SHALL SHORTLY EXPLAIN, IT'S AN **IMPORTANT PART** OF THE STORY
- ASIDE: IF YOU THOUGHT THE **PSYCHOLOGY** WAS **WISHY-WASHY WAFFLE**, THIS IS **REALLY** GOING TO BUG YOU
- WE'RE GOING TO LOOK AT **MYTH**

#### THE HERO'S JOURNEY

- **JOSEPH CAMPBELL, 1949**
  - "THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES"
- THE VARIOUS HEROIC MYTHS OF **ALL** CULTURES FOLLOW BASICALLY THE **SAME** PATTERN
  - AS DO THEIR **RELIGIOUS** STORIES
- NOTE **MYTHS**, NOT **NARRATIVES**
- ROOTED IN THE **HUMAN PSYCHE**
  - UNIVERSAL NEED TO EXPLAIN THE SAME, FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF **SOCIAL, WORLDLY** AND **other-worldly** REALITIES

#### EXAMPLES

- **MYTHS** FROM NIGERIA, NORTH AMERICA, AUSTRALIA, PHRYGIA, CHINA, ICELAND, BALI, PERSIA, MEXICO, FINLAND, CAMBODIA, PERU, ...
- THE **EPICS** OF GILGAMESH, ARTHUR, VISHNU, OSIRIS, MOSES, CUCHULAINN, BUDDHA, JASON, ...
- THE ODYSSEY, DANTE'S INFERNO, THE SLEEPING BEAUTY, ANNA KARENINA, FAUST, THE FROG KING, STAR WARS, **HARRY POTTER**, ...
- OH, AND **VIRTUAL WORLDS!**

#### DEPARTURE

- THE **CALL** TO ADVENTURE
  - INDICATION OF CHANGE TO COME, OFTEN SYMBOLIC
- **REFUSAL** OF THE CALL
  - REQUIRED TO ACT BUT WON'T (FEAR, DUTY?)
- **SUPERNATURAL AID**
  - A GUIDE APPEARS TO HELP THEM
- CROSSING OF THE **FIRST THRESHOLD**
  - ENTER WORLD OF ADVENTURE (DEFEAT GUARDIAN?)
- THE **BELLY** OF THE **WHALE**
  - FINAL SEPARATION FROM OLD SELF; REBIRTH

#### INITIATION

- THE **ROAD OF TRIALS** [USUALLY 3]
- THE MEETING WITH THE **GODDESS**
  - SYMBOLIC; EXPOSURE TO TOTALITY OF KNOWLEDGE
- WOMAN AS THE **TEMPTRESS**
  - OLD-WORLD ORIGINS AT ODDS WITH NEW WORLD
- **ATONEMENT** WITH THE FATHER [KEY POINT]
  - HERO FACES THE SUPREME POWER OVER HIM
- **APOTHEOSIS** [PEACE, REST, BLISS]
- THE ULTIMATE **BOON** [OBJECT HERO CAME FOR]

#### RETURN

- **REFUSAL** OF THE RETURN
- THE **MAGIC FLIGHT**
  - CAN'T STAY **AND** HAVE THE BOON
- **RESCUE** FROM WITHOUT
- CROSSING OF THE **RETURN** THRESHOLD
  - HOW TO RECONCILE THE OLD WITH THE NEW?
- MASTER OF THE **TWO WORLDS**
  - SENSE OF BALANCE, DESTINY ACCEPTED
- **FREEDOM TO LIVE**

#### APPLICATION TO VWS

- THE HERO'S JOURNEY HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED IN VIRTUAL WORLDS
  - **CHARACTER** FOLLOWS THE RECIPE
  - BECAUSE **DESIGNER** FOLLOWED THE RECIPE...
- HOWEVER, THAT'S **NOT** WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE
- THE **PLAYER** FOLLOWS THE HERO'S JOURNEY
  - THE PLAYER **IS** THE HERO
- THE **VIRTUAL WORLD** IS THE MYSTICAL **OTHER-WORLD** OF THE JOURNEY

#### VW DEPARTURE

- THE **CALL** TO ADVENTURE
  - ADVERT, ARTICLE, COVER DISK, SHELF UNIT, ...
- **REFUSAL** OF THE CALL
  - EXPENSE, TIME, FEAR OF INADEQUACY, SOCIAL LIFE, ...
- **SUPERNATURAL** AID
  - A FRIEND WHO ALREADY PLAYS, CS REP, ...
- CROSSING OF THE **FIRST THRESHOLD**
  - INSTALLING THE CLIENT SOFTWARE
- THE **BELLY** OF THE **WHALE**
  - CHARACTER GENERATION SYSTEM

#### VW INITIATION 1

- **THE ROAD OF TRIALS**
  - PLAYER FINDS THEIR FEET
  - OPPORTUNIST/GRIEFER STEP
- **THE MEETING WITH THE GODDESS**
  - PLAYER SEEKS KNOWLEDGE
  - NETWORKER/SCIENTIST STEP
- **WOMAN AS THE TEMPTRESS**
  - TRANSITION FROM LEARNING TO DOING
  - ARE THEY IN IT FOR THE **LONG HAUL?**

#### VW INITIATION 2

- **ATONEMENT WITH THE FATHER**
  - TRY TO SUCCEED ON THE WORLD'S **OWN TERMS**
  - ACHIEVER/POLITICIAN STEP
  - **LONGEST** PART OF THE JOURNEY
- **APOTHEOSIS**
  - UNDERSTAND THE WORLD, ITS PEOPLE, THEMSELVES
  - FRIEND/HACKER STEP
- **THE ULTIMATE BOON**
  - OH DEAR! VIRTUAL WORLDS ARE **VIRTUAL!**



#### VW RETURN 1

- **REFUSAL OF THE RETURN**
  - POWER, RESPECT, FRIENDS - WHY LEAVE?
- **THE MAGIC FLIGHT**
  - COMPELLING ELDER GAME ADDED?
- **RESCUE FROM WITHOUT**
  - PARENTS, WORKMATES, S.O., ...
  - YOUR **EXCUSE** TO LEAVE
- **CROSSING OF THE RETURN THRESHOLD**
  - STOP PLAYING BECAUSE YOU DON'T **NEED** TO PLAY ANY MORE

#### VW RETURN 2

- **MASTER OF THE TWO WORLDS**
  - **VIRTUAL** SELF AND **REAL** SELF ARE **ONE**
  - VIRTUAL WORLD IS A **PLACE** LIKE ANY OTHER
  - IT'S LOST ITS **mystical significance**
- **FREEDOM TO LIVE**
  - PLAYERS CAN FINALLY BE **THEMSELVES**
  - COMMERCIAL BENEFIT! THEY'LL KEEP THEIR ACCOUNTS **INDEFINITELY**
    - **16 YEARS** FOR SOME MUD2 PLAYERS

#### THE ANSWER AT LAST

- WHY DO PEOPLE PLAY IN VIRTUAL WORLDS?
- BECAUSE IT'S A **QUEST FOR IDENTITY**
- BY BEING SOMEONE **VIRTUAL**, THEY FIND OUT WHO THEY ARE IN **REALITY**
- WHATEVER THEY'RE DOING TO PURSUE THAT AIM THEY REGARD AS **FUN**
  - ALSO VERY **COMPELLING** [NOT ADDICTIVE]
- BUT **ETHICAL** ISSUES FOR VWS THAT DON'T ALLOW COMPLETION OF THE JOURNEY?

#### CONCLUSION

- **THIS** IS THE KIND OF THING WE LOOK AT IN **COMPUTER GAME STUDIES**
  - JUST WHAT TOP-NOTCH JOURNALS **DON'T WANT!**
- IT'S NOT ALL **VACUOUS** GRAPHICS, **FEEBLE** AI, C++ **HACKING**, PORTING OLD CLASSICS TO THE **NOKIA N-GAGE** AND LOCALISING **GREEN BLOOD** FOR **GERMANY**
- **IS** IT, HOWEVER, **ELECTRONICS** FARE?
- WELL, IT **IS FOR NOW!**