THREE VIEWS FROM 2018
(IN FOUR MOVIES)

INDEPENDENT MMO GDC
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• So, this is a **KEYNOTE** presentation
• What do you **EXPECT** from a keynote?
• Well, keynotes have to:
  – Inform
  – **Entertain**
  – **MAKE YOU THINK**
• **EASY!**
  – I can do that in **ONE SLIDE**
• Here’s a picture of Debbie **HARRY** (aka **BLONDIE**) with some **MUPPETS**
ENJOY
A QUESTION

• SO, WHAT I’M GOING TO TALK ABOUT TODAY COMES A QUESTION I AM OFTEN ASKED BY JOURNALISTS:

• “HOW DO YOU SEE VIRTUAL WORLDS 10 YEARS FROM NOW?”
  – AT LEAST IT’S BETTER THAN “I GUESS YOU’RE SURPRISED AT HOW FAR VIRTUAL WORLDS HAVE COME?”
  • YES, I AM – I THOUGHT WE’D BE MUCH FURTHER AHEAD THAN THIS BY NOW...
Differences

- The thing is, how I see virtual worlds 10 years from now **varies**
- It depends a lot on which **conference** I’m at when the journalist **corners** me
- With **designers** and developers, I’m **excited** and **upbeat** about the future
- With educators and **business** people, I’m **frustrated** and **depressed** about it
- With accountants and **lawyers**, I wonder if we even **have a future**
• One of these three views is almost certainly correct, but which one?

• So, suppose it’s 2018 – the year, not the time

• Here’s my Level 170 WoW paladin, as proof

• Let’s look back at how things went from these three possible views
VIEW ONE

• View From
  2018
  #1
Lee Van Cleef

- This is a still of actor Lee Van Cleef in the classic western, *High Noon*

- It was Van Cleef’s *First* movie role
  - Prior to taking it, he was an *Accountant*
High Noon

• High Noon was about one brave law enforcement officer (Gary Cooper) taking on a gang of ruthless outlaws with no help from the very people he was trying to protect

• This is almost what we saw in the 10 years leading up to 2018, except...

• Except it was a gang of ruthless law enforcement officers taking on the very people they were trying to protect with no help from the brave outlaws
Main Issues

- The main legal issues that brought down MMOS were:
  - Applying the laws **Wrongly**
  - Unfair **Contract** laws
  - Intellectual **Property** laws
  - Gambling/Gaming laws
  - Anti-Money-Laundering laws
  - Taxation laws
  - Mad **Patent** laws

- Let's look at these one at a time
Wrong Laws

- 10 years ago, people thought games and non-games should be treated differently by the law.
  - They still are for boxing, football and other sports, but they're not for virtual worlds.

- It only took one well-meaning judge to think what applied to Second Life applied to World of Warcraft and wham!

- "It's just a game" was no longer a defence.
• **The rot started when part of Linden Labs’ EULA was struck down in 2007**
  - This showed that EULAs weren’t bullet-proof
• **Groups of players complained that other parts of the EULA were unfair too**
  - Particularly those parts that seemed to sign away their “rights”
• **The critical point was when players won ownership over “their” virtual goods**
  - This brought property laws into play
IP LAWS

• IF PEOPLE OWN THINGS, YOU DON’T GET TO DESTROY OR ALTER THOSE THINGS
  – IN DESIGN TERMS, YOU DIDN’T GET TO NERF THEM
  – PLUS, YOU DIDN’T GET TO DENY PEOPLE ACCESS TO THEIR PROPERTY BY BANNING THEM

• ALSO, YOU CAN’T STOP PEOPLE SELLING STUFF
  – SO REAL-MONEY TRADING BECAME SUPPORTED BY THE LAW

• AND AS FOR PUBLISHING WORKS OF ART WITHOUT THE OWNER’S PERMISSION...
• WITH RMT ENDEMIC, VIRTUAL OBJECTS COULD CLEARLY BE SEEN TO HAVE REAL-WORLD VALUE

• THAT MEANT KILLING MOBS FOR DROPS WAS EFFECTIVELY A GAME OF CHANCE WITH A CASH REWARD

• THIS BROUGHT THE GAMBLING LAWS INTO PLAY

• MIDDLE AMERICA WAS UP IN ARMS!
  – PEOPLE COULD GAMBLE ONLINE? DIDN’T THEY BAN THAT IN 2006?!
MONEY LAUNDERING

• HERE’S HOW IT WORKED
  – STEP ONE: **STEAL** MONEY
  – STEP TWO: HAND MONEY TO **FRONT**
  – STEP THREE: **FRONT** BUYS **GAME GOLD** FROM **FARMERS**
  – STEP FOUR: **FRONT** TRANSFERS **GAME GOLD** TO YOUR **ALTS**
  – STEP FOUR: SELL **ALTS’ GAME GOLD FOR NOW FRESHLY-LAUNDERED MONEY**

• THE FINANCE AUTHORITIES DEMANDED AN AUDIT TRAIL THAT RAN TO **PETABYTES** EVERY DAY
TAXATION LAWS

• **YOU KILL A MONSTER, YOU GET 2GP**

• **BUT NO! THAT’S NOT 2GP, THAT’S 8 CENTS**
  – 8 CENTS YOU HAVE TO PAY **INCOME TAX** ON

• **YOU SELL YOUR SWORD OF KILL-IN-ONE-HIT FOR 800GP?**

• **BUT NO! THAT’S NOT 800GP, THAT’S $32**
  – $32 YOU HAVE TO PAY **SALES TAX** ON

• **THAT’S WHY TAX RETURNS RUN TO 200 PAGES THESE DAYS**
• You can patent **obvious** stuff for a **pittance** yet it costs the blood of 12 **freshly-slain virgins** to get the patent revoked.

• This **stifles** innovation somewhat.

• Fear not, though! The government **knows** that the patent laws are in need of an **overhaul**.

• They’re **working** on it...
• When I go to Law conferences, this is the future that appears before me.

• In part, it’s because Lawyers are like Programmers—Programmers see bugs in code—Lawyers see bugs in laws—Accountants see bugs in everything.

• Thus, they’re bound to highlight the problems—it’s their job.

• It scares the willies out of me, though.
VIEW TWO

VIEW FROM
2018
#2
• This is a publicity shot from the classic movie, \textit{The Misfits}. 
TRAGEDY

• **THE MISFITS** WAS THE **LAST** MOVIE MADE BY **CLARK GABLE** AND **MARILYN MONROE**

• OF THE FIVE TOP-BILLED ACTORS:
  - GABLE HAD A **HEART ATTACK** 3 DAYS AFTER FILMING STOPPED, AND DIED **11 DAYS** LATER
  - 18 MONTHS AFTER THAT, MONROE DIED OF A **DRUGS OVERDOSE**
  - MONTGOMERY CLIFT DIED **4 YEARS** AFTER FILMING
  - THELMA RITTER DIED **8 YEARS** AFTER FILMING

• **ONLY ELI WALLACH** SURVIVED
THE MISFITS

• The plot of *The Misfits* concerns four cowboys struggling to maintain their once-romantic lifestyle in 1960s Nevada.

• The cowboys’ time had *come and gone*, but they didn’t *accept* the inevitable.
  – They were *trapped* in the past.

• This is what happened to *MMOs* in the period 2008 to 2018.
  – The world *moved on* leaving the gamers behind, their idealistic dreams *irrelevant*. 
PIONEERS

•Gamers were the pioneers who tamed new lands
•However, business folk and educators were the settlers who followed
•They were drawn to virtual worlds because of what was special about them
•They then proceeded to remove this and go with their own ideas of fun©
•What we have in 2018 is a pale shadow of what once was
• **GAMES & NON-GAMES**

• **BACK IN 2008, THERE WAS A DISTINCTION**
  
  – **GAME WORLDS:** IMAGINARY PLACES OF AWE, EXCITEMENT AND THE FREEDOM TO BE
  
  – **NON-GAME WORLDS:** ADJUNCTS TO REALITY

• **SO, WAIT, AM I SAYING THAT MMOS DIDN’T USED TO BE PART OF THE REAL WORLD?!**

• **YES INDEED: THEY USED TO BE SEPARATE**
  
  – IT’S WHAT MADE THEM SPECIAL

• **REPEATED INCURSIONS BY REALITY WERE FINALLY TOO MUCH TO STAVE OFF, THOUGH**
**Factors**

- With too much **reality** in them, MMOS **became unsustainable as fantasies**
- There was no **single** factor that introduced too much reality
  - It was a gradual **accumulation**
- Existing players’ expectations were **lowered**
  - New players’ expectations were never high in the **first** place
- I’ll give some examples of how imagination was gradually **chipped away**
Casual Players

• If you want to start a new MMO, where do the players come from?
  - Old MMOs – but then you’re acquiring disloyal customers
  - Utter MMO newbies

• How do you attract MMO newbies?
  - If they liked the concept of MMOs, they’d be playing already, wouldn’t they?

• You aim for casual players
  - Make your MMO’s gameplay more casual
• How do you make money from casuals?
  – “The internet is free!”

• One way is to use advertisements

• Warning! Warning! Advertisements are reality! MMOs are virtual!

• Out-of-context real adverts seen in virtual worlds prick the virtual bubble

• Initially, people paid not to see the ads
  – Strangely, advertisers didn’t like that...
Micro-payments

- Another “let’s pretend it’s free” business model is micro-payments
  - Popular among Indies

- Sell people virtual goods and services for real money
  - 10% pay for the other 90% to play

- So ... the richer I am in real life, the more successful I am in the game?

- Removes any sense of fair play
  - Is it a game if you can buy success?
• Micro-payments made it **easy** to get **money from children**
  – Therefore, virtual worlds were created **aimed at children**

• Remember the **first** MMO you played? How it was a wonderful, **glorious** experience?

• Those of you who played your first MMO aged **8** maybe won’t recall that...

• When **children** first played, they saw the experience as **mundane**
EDUTAINMENT

• GAMES = fun!
• EDUCATION = unfun
• IDEA: EDUCATION+GAMES = fun education!
• ACTUALITY: EDUCATION+GAMES = unfun games
• GAMES WERE USED BY EARNEST NON-GAMERS AS TEACHING TOOLS
• THE SANCTITY OF GAME SPACES AS RETREATS FROM REALITY DISAPPEARED
  – PLAYING WAS TOO MUCH LIKE HOMEWORK
SUMMARY

• WHEN I GO TO BUSINESS OR EDUCATION CONFERENCES, THIS THE FUTURE THAT APPEARS
  – MMOS AS WAYS TO SELL PEOPLE THINGS OR TO PAPER OVER CRACKS IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM
• MMOS AREN'T REGARDED AS WORTHWHILE IN THEIR OWN RIGHT
• BLANDNESS AND DILUTION OF THE PARADIGM COULD REMOVE ALL THEY HAVE TO OFFER
  – SOME CORPORATES THINK FACEBOOK IS A VIRTUAL WORLD!
VIEW THREE

VIEW FROM 2018

#3
Dirty Harry

- Here's a publicity still from the movie Dirty Harry
  - Actually, it's from Dirty Harry 2, but let's not be picky...
In Dirty Harry, Clint Eastwood plays Inspector “Dirty” Harry Callaghan – tracking down a sociopathic sniper who’s holding a city to ransom.

He’s on the side of good, but
- He’s an insubordinate maverick
- He has no patience with bad guys
- He sees the legal system as out of touch

But he wins in the end

Why does he win?
because

- He **WINS** because he has a

**BIG F***ING GUN**
Back in 2008, MMO designers had a BFG.

The 2008 US presidential election was the last one in which being critical of games was regarded as a vote-winning strategy.

The new president soon found this out.
DEMOGRAPHICS

• **THE MEDIAN AGE OF AMERICANS IN 2007 WAS 36.6**
  - HALF OF AMERICA WAS BORN 1970 OR AFTER

• **THESE PEOPLE**
  - PLAYED COMPUTER GAMES
  - DIDN’T FEEL **ADDICTED** TO THEM
  - WEREN’T **PSYCHOPATHIC KILLERS**
  - **RESENTED** POLITICIANS WHO IMPLIED THEY WERE **PSYCHOPATHIC KILLERS**

• **AS FOR MMOS’ BEING ANTI-SOCIAL – HA!**
• The **BFG** that MMO developers wielded was the fact that they’d **already won**
  – They already had the **numbers** on their side

• Older politicians were **out of touch**
  – They were **astonished** to find that anti-MMO laws would **cost** them votes!

• Business and education **wasted** money trying to **commodify** imagination
  – If you make the imaginary **real**, it ceases to be **imaginary**
The flowering of bijoux MMOS that began 10 years or so ago brought in actual new players

- Different people like different things
  - Not everyone likes elves/ray guns/zombies

Casual doesn’t mean causal

MMO devkits and low-cost art/animation assets opened virtual world creation up to all and sundry

The real world became a better place
• **THIS** IS THE FUTURE THAT OPENS UP BEFORE ME WHEN I SPEAK TO **DESIGNERS AND DEVELOPERS**
  – THESE PEOPLE BRING SUCH **PASSION** TO THEIR WORK – HOW CAN THEY POSSIBLY FAIL?

• IMAGINATION AND FREEDOM OF SPIRIT ARE **TREMENDOUS** **DRIVERS**

• **MMOS** GIVE PEOPLE SOMETHING THEY JUST **CAN’T GET ELSEWHERE**
  – THE ABILITY TO **BE THEMSELVES**
Back in 2008

- So, which of these **three possible futures** are we most likely to see?
- I guess I should think of **catchy names** for them first...
- Hmm, maybe some of those **actors** I mentioned might help?
AAA AAA

• YES, THAT WORKS...
So we have

• The good
  - Virtual worlds give **Humans** a place to be **Human**

• The bad
  - Virtual worlds stifled by real world **laws**

• The ugly
  - Virtual worlds become **mundane**

• Let's have a show of hands: which is **most** likely to happen?
• WHAT DO I THINK WILL HAPPEN?
• WELL, THIS IS AN MMO CONFERENCE, SO I ALREADY TOLD YOU

• NO, REALLY, I DID ALREADY TELL YOU!
• CLINT EASTWOOD – “THE GOOD”: WHAT WAS THE NAME OF HIS CHARACTER IN THAT MOVIE?
AND THE ANSWER IS...

- **BLONDIE!**
- **REAL NAME DEBBIE HARRY**
  - CLOSE ENOUGH TO **DIRTY HARRY** TO BE SPOOKY...
• SO YES, I **DO** THINK MMOS WILL WIN
• BASICALLY, ALL THERE IS STANDING IN THE WAY IS A **BUNCH OF MUPPETS**
CONCLUSION

• The future may not look like this 10 years from now, but it will look like this.

• MMOS provide too much that people want for them not to succeed.

• If they do find themselves legislated away or condemned to obscurity, it’ll only be a temporary setback.

• They’re just too damned good not to win in the end.