

# A BETTER WORLD THROUGH BETTER WORLDS

MMORPGS AND PRACTICAL HACKER ETHICS

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WAAG SOCIETY

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## INTRODUCTION

- **FORMALLY**, I WAS INVITED HERE TO TALK ABOUT "THE INFLUENCE OF UTOPIAN THINKING ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY AND ITS APPLICATION IN THE 1980S"
- **INFORMALLY**, IT'S BECAUSE BACK IN THE EARLY 1980S I WAS A **HACKER**
- GIVEN THAT PART OF THE **HACKER ETHIC** IS TO **MISTRUST AUTHORITY**, I FEEL **NO** OBLIGATION TO KEEP TO THE OFFICIAL TOPIC
- HOWEVER, AS IT HAPPENS I (KIND OF) **DO**...

## HACKER?

- THE 1980S IS WHEN THE WORD "HACKER" WAS **STOLEN** BY THE MEDIA TO MEAN "A **NERD** WHO DOES **BAD** THINGS TO **COMPUTERS**"
  - I'M **NOT** THAT KIND OF HACKER...
- **I'M** THE KIND OF HACKER WHO **PLAYS** WITH COMPUTERS FOR THE SHEER **JOY** OF IT
  - EVIDENCE: THE **NEW HACKER'S DICTIONARY** DESCRIBES A PROGRAM I WROTE AS A **HACK**
    - THE HACKERS AMONG YOU WILL KNOW WHY THIS ISN'T **QUITE** AS BOASTFUL AS IT SOUNDS...

## SCOPE

- I CAN'T TALK ABOUT **ALL** THE INFLUENCES OF UTOPIAN THINKING ON BLAH BLAH BLAH
  - BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW THEM ALL!
- I **CAN** TALK ABOUT HOW ONE **PARTICULAR** MANIFESTATION OF UTOPIAN THINKING HAS INFLUENCED THE WORLD
  - THIS IS THE CREATION OF **VIRTUAL** WORLDS
- **IMPORTANT:** VIRTUAL WORLDS **AREN'T** THEMSELVES UTOPIAS!
  - I'LL COME BACK TO THIS LATER...

## VIRTUAL WORLDS

- SO WHAT ARE **VIRTUAL WORLDS**?
- THEY'RE **PERSISTENT**, SIMULATED **ENVIRONMENTS** IMPLEMENTED ON **COMPUTERS**, WHICH **MULTIPLE** PEOPLE CAN VISIT **SIMULTANEOUSLY**
  - DON'T WORRY, I **HAVE** EXAMPLES...
- I'M GOING TO SPEND THE REST OF THIS TALK EXPLAINING:
  - WHY THEY'RE **IMPORTANT**
  - HOW HACKER CULTURE **SHAPED** THEM

## WORLD OF WARCRAFT

- *WORLD OF WARCRAFT*, BLIZZARD, 2004:



#### STATS

- *WORLD OF WARCRAFT* HAS OVER **4,000,000** PLAYERS WORLDWIDE
- THAT **ONE GAME** HAS MORE **PLAYERS** THAN THERE ARE **PEOPLE** IN **IRELAND**
  - **16** TIMES MORE PEOPLE THAN **ICELAND**
- EACH ONE OF THOSE PLAYERS IS PAYING **\$15** A **MONTH** IN SUBSCRIPTIONS
  - **AND** THEY HAD TO BUY THE SOFTWARE, TOO
- AT LEAST **25%** OF ITS PLAYERS ARE **FEMALE**

#### ELSEWHERE

- *LINEAGE*, NC SOFT, 1997



#### STATS

- *LINEAGE* IS A SOUTH KOREAN GAME
- IT HAD **4,200,000** PLAYERS WHEN *LINEAGE 2* LAUNCHED IN 2003
  - HALF MIGRATED TO *LINEAGE 2*, HALF STAYED
- **50%** OF THE POPULATION OF SOUTH KOREA HAS PLAYED *LINEAGE* AT LEAST **ONCE**
  - SOUTH KOREA'S POPULATION IS 48,000,000
- THERE ARE AT LEAST **10** VIRTUAL WORLDS IN THE FAR EAST WITH OVER 1,000,000 PLAYERS
  - AND **HUNDREDS** WITH OVER 10,000

#### "ADDICTION"

- SOME PEOPLE SPEND MORE TIME IN **VIRTUAL** WORLDS THAN THEY DO IN THE **REAL** WORLD
  - PEOPLE HAVE **DIED** AT THE KEYBOARD FROM PLAYING 3+ DAYS CONTINUOUSLY WITHOUT SLEEP
- THAILAND HAS A 10PM-6AM **CURFEW** ON VIRTUAL WORLDS
- CHINA HAS A **3 HOUR PER DAY** LIMIT
- ONE PLAYER **MURDERED** HIS FRIEND FOR **SELLING** HIS CHARACTER'S **SWORD**
  - TALKING OF WHICH...

#### REAL MONEY TRADING

- **RMT** IS WHERE PEOPLE BUY AND SELL THEIR **VIRTUAL** GOODS USING **REAL** MONEY
  - USUALLY **AGAINST** THE WISHES OF THE DEVELOPER
- AS I WRITE THIS, **EBAY** HAS 3 CHARACTERS FROM *RUNEQUEST* AT OVER \$1,000 EACH
- **ITEMBAY** MAKES MORE MONEY FROM RMT THAN **ALL** THE VIRTUAL WORLDS IT SERVICES MAKE IN SUBSCRIPTIONS, **COMBINED**
- WORLD MARKET IS CLOSE TO \$1,000,000,000 ANNUALLY
  - CONSERVATIVE - COULD BE **20 TIMES** THAT MUCH!

#### IMPORTANCE

- OK, **HOPEFULLY** I'VE SHOWN THAT THESE GAMES ARE OF GROWING IMPORTANCE
- WHAT DO THEY HAVE TO DO WITH THE **HACKER ETHIC**, THOUGH?
- TO FIND OUT, WE NEED TO FOLLOW BACK THEIR **FAMILY TREE**...
  - I'LL GIVE THE *WORLD OF WARCRAFT* BRANCH, BUT THE ROOT IS THE SAME FOR PRETTY WELL **EVERY** OTHER VIRTUAL WORLD OUT THERE TOO

## EVERQUEST

- *EVERQUEST*, SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT, 1999



## CONNECTION

- *EVERQUEST* RULED UNTIL *WOW* CAME ALONG
  - 480,000 SUBSCRIPTIONS AT ITS PEAK
- *WOW* IS **MODELLED** ON *EQ*
  - BLIZZARD LOOKED AT *EQ* AND FIGURED **THEY** COULD DO THE **SAME** THING ONLY **BETTER**
  - *EQ*'S AND *WOW*'S UNDERLYING ARCHITECTURE AND PRINCIPLES ARE THE SAME
    - THE ACTUAL **CODE** IS DIFFERENT, THOUGH!
  - MUCH OF THE UNDERLYING **DESIGN** IS THE SAME
    - LEVELS, CLASSES, RACES, COMBAT, GUILDS, ...

## DIKUMUD

- *DIKUMUD*, COPENHAGEN UNIVERSITY, 1990

```
lx2l A barrel has been left here.  
An angry-looking statue of Hoturi is standing here.  
An angry-looking statue of Priapus is standing here.  
A statue of Odin is standing behind the altar.  
A Sign for Newbies is here.  
You are a guest here until you save yourself.
```

```
If you need  
to get to your guild, use the guild medallion in your inventory. If you lose  
it, pray to the statue of Odin for another.
```

```
105m/202e/38hlook  
temple of Udgaard
```

```
You are inside the small and humble village temple in Udgaard. A simple  
stone altar, with strange stone carvings, is placed against the north wall. A  
small humble donation room is to the east. The temple exit is south to the  
Village Square.
```

```
lx2l A barrel has been left here.  
An angry-looking statue of Hoturi is standing here.  
An angry-looking statue of Priapus is standing here.  
A statue of Odin is standing behind the altar.  
A Sign for Newbies is here.
```

```
105m/202e/38h
```

## CONNECTION

- EQ IS BASICALLY A *DIKUMUD* WITH A **GRAPHICS ENGINE** BOLTED ON
  - THE GAMEPLAY IS PRETTY WELL **IDENTICAL**
  - SO MUCH SO THAT THE DEVELOPERS HAD TO SIGN AN **AFFIDAVIT** TO SWEAR THEY DIDN'T **RIP OFF** ANY ACTUAL *DIKU* CODE!
- EQ'S DESIGNERS HAD PLAYED *DIKUS* EXTENSIVELY AND FIGURED **THEY** COULD DO THE **SAME** THING ONLY **BETTER**
- UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES *ETC* ARE THE SAME



## ABERMUD

- **ABERMUD, ALAN COX, 1987**

```
Your wimpy value is set to 15. See 'help change' to see what that means.

The Temple Of Paradise
  You stand in the Temple of Paradise, a huge sandstone structure whose
  walls are decorated with ancient carvings and runes, some so old that even
  the priests no longer know their meanings.
  A single set of steps lead south, descending the huge mound upon which the
  temple is built and ending in the forests below.
  A roaring fire burns here. Its flames make the temple sparkle and glitter.
  At your feet a huge sacrificial pit allows you to give valuables to the gods
  in the hope of being rewarded.
  A furled umbrella lies here.

Obvious exits are:
North : Welcome Center
South : Forest Track
Down  : Forest Track

Last login: Wed Sep  7 17:43:26 2005

>
```

## CONNECTION

- **DIKUMUD IS A MORE HARD-CORE FANTASY GAME THAN ABERMUD**
  - THE DESIGN WAS STREAMLINED TO APPEAL TO **ACHIEVERS**
  - CAME WITH AN EXTENSIVELY **TESTED** GAME WORLD
  - **RAN** "OUT OF THE BOX"
- **DIKUMUDS DESIGNERS HAD PLAYED ABERMUD EXTENSIVELY AND FIGURED **THEY** COULD DO THE **SAME** THING ONLY **BETTER****
- **UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES ETC ARE THE SAME**

## MUD

- *MUD*, ROY TRUBSHAW & RICHARD BARTLE, 1978

Narrow road between lands.

You are stood on a narrow road between The Land and whence you came. To the north and south are the small foothills of a pair of majestic mountains, with a large wall running round. To the west the road continues, where in the distance you can see a thatched cottage opposite an ancient cemetery. The way out is to the east, where a shroud of mist covers the secret pass by which you entered The Land. It is raining.

\*w

Narrow road.

You are on a narrow east-west road with a forest to the north and Gorse scrub to the south. It is raining. A splendid necklace lies on the ground.

\*

- THIS IS WHY **I** GET TO GIVE THIS TALK AND **YOU** DON'T...

## CONNECTION

- *ABERMUD* WAS JUST ONE OF SEVERAL **DOZEN** MUD CLONES OF THE ERA
  - GENERALLY REGARDED AS HAVING **INFERIOR** GAMEPLAY TO THE ORIGINAL
- HOWEVER, IT RAN ON ANY **UNIX** SYSTEM
  - *MUD* ONLY RAN ON **DEC**SYSTEM 10 MAINFRAMES
- IT SPREAD ACROSS THE NET LIKE A **RASH**
- ALAN COX PLAYED *MUD* EXTENSIVELY AND FIGURED **HE** COULD DO *ETC*

#### PRE-MUD

- THERE WERE **NO** VIRTUAL WORLDS BEFORE *MUD*
  - IT'S THEREFORE OFTEN REFERRED TO AS **MUDI**
- THE CONCEPT OF A VIRTUAL WORLD WAS INVENTED **INDEPENDENTLY** AT LEAST **6** TIMES
  - *MUD, SCEPTRE OF GOTH, AVATAR, ISLAND OF KESMAI, ARADATH, MONSTER*
- *MUD* WAS FIRST, HOWEVER, AND ALMOST **ALL** VIRTUAL WORLDS **DESCEND** FROM IT
  - TRACES OF OTHERS **DO** PERSIST (EXCEPT *AVATAR*)

#### PERPETUATION

- SO WHY HAVE I **TOLD** YOU ALL THIS?
  - APART FROM REASONS OF SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT?
- BECAUSE SOME OF THE **DECISIONS** WE MADE WHEN WE WROTE *MUD* ARE STILL **INTACT**
- EXAMPLE: WHY DOES *WOW* HAVE **LEVELS**?
  - BECAUSE *EQ* HAD LEVELS
    - BECAUSE *DIKUMUD* HAD LEVELS
      - BECAUSE *ABERMUD* HAD LEVELS
        - » BECAUSE *MUD* HAD LEVELS
- *MUD* HAD LEVELS BECAUSE I **GAVE** IT LEVELS

#### PROPAGATION

- MUCH OF THE **ARCHITECTURE** AND **GAMEPLAY** OF TODAY'S VIRTUAL WORLDS IS THE WAY IT IS **ONLY** BECAUSE, ULTIMATELY, THAT'S HOW IT WAS IN *MUD*
- NOT **ALL**, OBVIOUSLY
  - *DIKUMUD* INTRODUCED CLASSES AND RACES
  - *EQ* INTRODUCED GRAPHICS
  - MANY **OTHER** REFINEMENTS
    - DESIGNERS OFTEN **DID** DO IT **BETTER** THAN THEIR "PARENT" WORLD

#### CODE & CULTURE

- IT'S NOT **JUST** THE CODE, THOUGH
- WHY DO PLAYERS OF *WOW* CALL MONSTERS "MOBS"?
- BECAUSE WHEN I ADDED **MONSTERS** TO *MUD*, I CALLED THEM **MOBILES** (FOR "MOBILE OBJECTS")
  - WE GOT THE WORD **NEWBIES** THAT WAY, TOO
- THE **CULTURE** OF VIRTUAL WORLDS **ALSO** PROPAGATES FROM PARENT TO CHILD

#### ORIGINAL CULTURE

- THE BEHAVIOUR OF PLAYERS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD IS **SHAPED** BY ITS code AND ITS culture (WHICH ARE **INTER-RELATED**)
- **BOTH** OF THESE ARE, TO A LARGE EXTENT, **INHERITED** FROM THE **PARENT** VIRTUAL WORLD
  - IMMIGRANTS FROM THE **REAL** WORLD BRING SOME CULTURE WITH THEM TOO, OF COURSE
- *MUD* DIDN'T **HAVE** A PARENT VIRTUAL WORLD
  - SO WHERE DID **ITS** CULTURE COME FROM?

#### HACKERS

- *MUD* GOT ITS CULTURE FROM THAT OF ITS **DESIGNERS**
  - ROY TRUBSHAW AND I
- IN OTHER WORDS, FROM THE **HACKER** CULTURE OF THE TIME
- IT WASN'T ALL **INCIDENTAL**, EITHER
  - HACKER CULTURE DIDN'T GET IN THROUGH MERE **OSMOSIS**
  - WE **DELIBERATELY** PROMOTED HACKER IDEALS
  - SOME OF THESE **PERSIST TO THIS DAY**

#### FREEDOM

- EXAMPLE: **FREEDOM OF IDENTITY**
- I SAW *MUD* AS A WAY OF GIVING PEOPLE THE FREEDOM TO BE WHO THEY **WANT** TO BE
  - IN OTHER WORDS, WHO THEY REALLY **ARE**
- I THEREFORE MADE IT AS **OPEN-ENDED** AS POSSIBLE
  - NO NARRATIVE, NO RAILS TO RUN ON
- VIRTUAL WORLDS STILL VALUE FREEDOM TO **BE**
  - DETERIORATING AT THE **EDGES**, THOUGH
    - CLASSES, RACES, INSTANCED DUNGEONS, STORY ARCS...

#### POLLY'S STORY

- DO I HAVE TIME TO TELL **POLLY'S STORY?**

#### SEEDS SOWN

- PEOPLE BRING MUCH **REAL-WORLD** CULTURE INTO VIRTUAL WORLDS
  - LANGUAGE, MORALITY, SOCIAL **NORMS**
- HOWEVER, THE TRAFFIC IS **NOT** ALL ONE WAY
- PEOPLE **CHANGE** IN VIRTUAL WORLDS
  - THEY BECOME **MORE** OF WHO THEY **ARE**
- SOME OF WHAT THEY **LEARN** THERE, THEY BRING **BACK** TO THE **REAL** WORLD
  - AND **WHAT** THEY LEARN IS FOUNDED ON **HACKER ETHICS**

#### PRINCIPLES

- THE BASIC **IDEALS** THAT ROY AND I INSTILLED IN *MUD* ARE AFFECTING PEOPLE **TODAY**
  - **MILLIONS** OF THEM
- FREEDOM, TOLERANCE, INDIVIDUALITY, IMAGINATION, ART, REBELLION, **UNDERSTANDING**
- **POLITICALLY**, THIS WOULD BE CLASSIFIED AS SOME KIND OF NON-PATERNALISTIC, COUNTER-CULTURAL **LIBERALISM**
  - IN *DED* TERMS, **CHAOTIC GOOD**
  - DEFINITELY **NOT** SPIRITUAL OR RELIGIOUS!

#### WHENCE HACKERS?

- HOW COME ROY AND I ADOPTED HACKER ETHICS?
  - INDEED, **STILL** ESPOUSE THEM?
- I REALLY HAVE **NO IDEA!**
  - MAYBE ONLY PEOPLE WHO THOUGHT THAT WAY COULD **PROGRAM** IN THOSE DAYS?
- THERE **WAS** A DEFINITE **HACKER CULTURE** AT ESSEX UNIVERSITY WHEN I ARRIVED
- HOWEVER, AT THE TIME IT ALL JUST SEEMED **OBVIOUS** TO ME ANYWAY
  - EXCEPT I DIDN'T KNOW THE **TERMINOLOGY**

#### CLASSIC HACKER ETHICS

- HOW DOES WHAT ROY AND I FELT CORRELATE WITH STEVEN LEVY'S HACKER PRINCIPLES?
- INFORMATION SHOULD BE **FREE**
  - I PUT THE CONCEPT OF VIRTUAL WORLDS INTO THE **PUBLIC DOMAIN** IN 1985
- CREATE **ART AND BEAUTY**
  - I CERTAINLY SAW *MUD* AS ARTISTIC EXPRESSION
- COMPUTERS CAN **CHANGE YOUR LIFE**
  - **AND** THE LIVES OF **OTHERS**



#### ETHICS

- ROY AND I **DIDN'T** CONSIDER OURSELVES TO BE PUTTING **HACKER** ETHICS INTO *MUD*
  - WE WERE PUTTING **OUR** ETHICS INTO IT
  - IT'S JUST THAT THESE WOULD NOW BE **CALLED** "HACKER ETHICS"
- WERE WE THEREFORE ATTEMPTING TO BUILD SOME KIND OF HACKER **UTOPIA**?
  - I **SAID** I'D COME BACK TO THIS LATER!
- WE WERE, YES, BUT **NOT** IN SOFTWARE
  - **THROUGH** SOFTWARE!

#### THE WHOLE PICTURE

- ANYONE WHO CONSTRUCTS A VIRTUAL WORLD TO BE A UTOPIA IS **MISSING THE POINT**
- IT'S THE **REAL WORLD** THAT SHOULD BE A UTOPIA, NOT SOME **VIRTUAL** WORLD
- BY **CHANGING** PEOPLE FOR THE **BETTER** THROUGH THEIR EXPERIENCE OF **VIRTUAL** WORLDS, THE **REAL** WORLD BECOMES A SLIGHTLY **BETTER PLACE**
- IT'S A **DROP** IN THE **OCEAN**, BUT LOTS OF DROPS **MAKE** AN OCEAN

#### CONCLUSION

- VIRTUAL WORLDS **AREN'T** UTOPIAS
- HOWEVER, THEY ENABLE THE REAL WORLD TO **BECOME** A UTOPIA
  - A PLACE WHERE **INDIVIDUALS** CAN BE **FREE**
- **THAT'S** THE IDEALISTIC DREAM
- **THAT'S** WHAT ROY AND I WERE DOING WITH *MUD*
- **THAT'S** WHERE THE **FUTURE** LIES
- **THAT'S** THE HACKER ETHIC