

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*, NCSoft, 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