

MASSIVELY MULTHERO

WHY PEOPLE PLAY VIRTUAL WORLDS

NOVEMBER, 2004

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INTRODUCTION

- **"VIRTUAL WORLDS"** IS THE TERM I'M USING TO REFER TO WHAT ARE VARIOUSLY CALLED MMORPGS, MMOGS, MUDS AND A **DOZEN** OR MORE OTHER ACRONYMS
 - WHAT I'M SAYING APPLIES TO **ALL** OF THESE, SO I DON'T FEEL **TOO** BAD ABOUT THAT...
- MY CONCERN HERE IS **WHY** PLAYERS PLAY VIRTUAL WORLDS
 - IN PARTICULAR, WHAT DOES A **THEORY** OF WHY THEY PLAY HAVE ON VIRTUAL WORLD **DESIGN**?

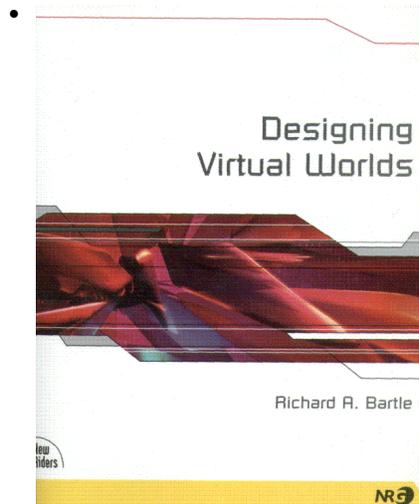
A THEORY...

- THERE ALREADY **IS** A THEORY THAT EXPLAINS WHY PEOPLE PLAY VIRTUAL WORLDS
 - BARTLE'S **PLAYER TYPES**
- **WIDELY** ACCEPTED BY PLAYERS AND DESIGNERS
- OVER 275,000 PEOPLE HAVE TAKEN AN ONLINE TEST BASED ON IT
 - [HTTP://WWW.ANDREASEN.ORG/BARTLE/](http://www.andreasen.org/bartle/)
- PLAYERS **SAY** THEY PLAY TO **HAVE FUN**
 - THIS THEORY EXPLAINS WHAT THEY **MEAN** BY "FUN"

HOWEVER...

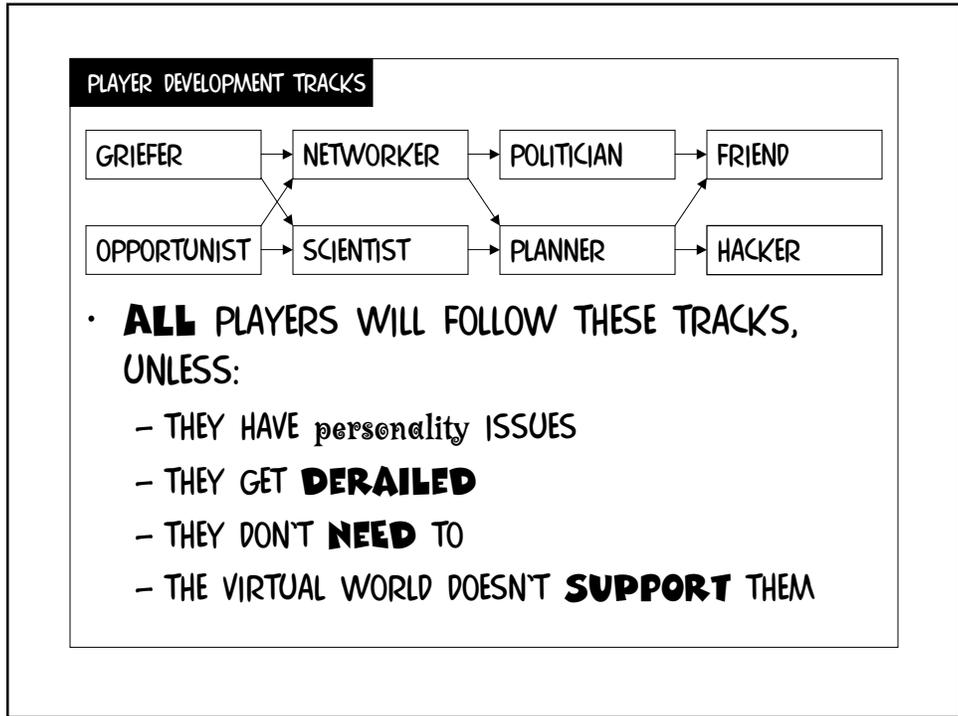
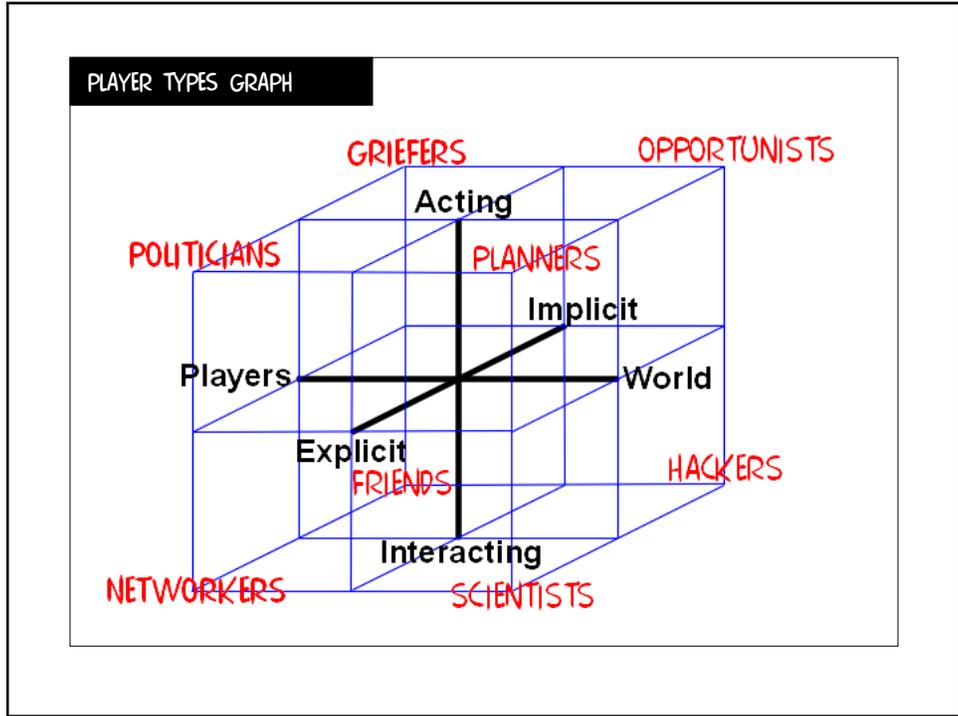
- THE THEORY **DOESN'T** EXPLAIN WHY SOME PLAYERS OF THE **SAME** TYPE SEEM TO HAVE RADICALLY **DIFFERENT** APPROACHES
 - NON-KILLER "KILLERS"
- IT **ALSO** DOESN'T EXPLAIN HOW PLAYERS **CHANGE TYPE** OVER TIME
 - WHICH THEY **DO**, IN STRANGELY SIMILAR WAYS
 - FIRST NOTICED BACK IN THE 1980s
- SO IN MY 2003 BOOK I **UPDATED** THE THEORY

SHAMELESS PLUG



THE NEW THEORY

- THERE'S **INSUFFICIENT TIME** TO DETAIL THE THEORY HERE, BUT **THIS** IS WHAT IT POSITS:
 - PLAYERS EXHIBIT **DISSIMILAR**, BUT **RELATED** AND **ENUMERABLE**, PLAYING STYLES
 - THEY FOLLOW **PREDICTABLE** PATHS THROUGH THESE PLAYING STYLES OVER TIME AS THEY PLAY
 - PROGRESSION ALONG THESE PATHS AMOUNTS TO A **QUEST** FOR **SELF-ACTUALISATION**
 - **THIS** IS WHAT MAKES VIRTUAL WORLDS **FUN** TO AN EXTENT BEYOND THAT WHICH CAN BE DERIVED FROM (OTHER) COMPUTER GAMES



PLAYER PROGRESSION

- PROGRESSION ALWAYS FOLLOWS THE **SAME** PATTERN:
 - PLAYERS ESTABLISH THEIR **LIMITS**
 - THEY WORK ON ACQUIRING **KNOWLEDGE** OF THE VIRTUAL WORLD
 - THEY **APPLY** THIS KNOWLEDGE TO ACHIEVE SOME **GOAL** (THIS IS THE **GAME** PART)
 - THEY **INTERNALISE** WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED
- THIS **PROGRESSION** HAS PARALLELS IN **MYTH**
 - **THIS** IS WHAT MY TALK TODAY CONCERNS

MYTH PRIMER

- IN A FAMOUS ANALYSIS OF MYTHS FROM **ACROSS THE WORLD**, JOSEPH CAMPBELL IDENTIFIED A SINGLE **TEMPLATE** TO WHICH THEY ALL CONFORMED
 - THE **HERO'S JOURNEY**, OR **MONOMYTH**
- A HERO TAKES A JOURNEY TO AN "**OTHER WORLD**" OF **DANGER** AND **ADVENTURE**, WHERE NORMAL RULES **DON'T APPLY**
 - RESULTS IN A **POSITIVE TRANSFORMATION** OF THE INDIVIDUAL UNDERTAKING IT

PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

- THE HERO'S JOURNEY CAN BE REGARDED AS A **PRESCRIPTION** FOR SELF-DISCOVERY
- IF YOU **COMPLETE** THE JOURNEY, YOU'VE FOUND THE "**REAL**" YOU
- **UNFORTUNATELY**, YOU NEED TO GO SOMEWHERE **UNREAL** TO DO THIS
 - **VIRTUAL WORLDS** ARE SUCH PLACES!
- **IMPORTANT**: THIS IS **PSYCHOLOGY**, NOT **NARRATOLOGY**!
 - NARRATIVE MESSES IT UP, IN FACT

PHASES

- THE HERO'S JOURNEY HAS THREE **PHASES**
- **DEPARTURE**
 - LEAVE THE **MUNDANE** WORLD FOR THE **WORLD OF ADVENTURE**
- **INITIATION**
 - **EXCLUSIVELY** IN THE WORLD OF ADVENTURE
- **RETURN**
 - HOMECOMING
 - THE WORLD OF ADVENTURE **IS NOW MUNDANE** FOR THE HERO

STEPS

- THERE ARE **17** STEPS TO THE HERO'S JOURNEY
 - I'M ONLY GOING TO LOOK AT THE **6** UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE VIRTUAL WORLD'S DESIGN TEAM
 - SEE MY BOOK IF YOU WANT TO KNOW HOW THE **OTHER 11** FIT IN
- I'M ABOUT TO SHOW THAT THE WAY VIRTUAL WORLD DESIGNERS **CURRENTLY** OPERATE **DENIES** THE HERO'S JOURNEY
- IF THEY ALLOWED THINGS TO PROGRESS **NATURALLY**, THEY'D GET **BETTER** RESULTS

THE BELLY OF THE WHALE

- FINAL STEP OF THE **DEPARTURE** PHASE
- ENTERING THE WORLD OF ADVENTURE IS AKIN TO AN **ACT OF REBIRTH**
 - SYMBOLISED IN MYTH BY **EXPPELLATION** FROM A **WOMB**-LIKE OBJECT
- IN VIRTUAL WORLDS, THIS IS **CHARACTER CREATION**
- PLAYER GETS TO **ANNIHILATE** THE SELF AND CREATE A **NEW** SELF AS WHOM THEY WILL JOURNEY INTO THE **UNKNOWN**

THE ROAD OF TRIALS

- **NEW-BORN** INTO THE WORLD OF ADVENTURE, THE HERO FACES A SERIES OF **TRIALS**
 - **OBSTACLES** THAT MUST BE OVERCOME IF THE HERO IS TO **PROGRESS**
 - NOT USUALLY VERY DIFFICULT
- THESE TEACH THE HERO THE **RULES** OF THE SPECIAL WORLD THEY'RE NOW IN
- MATCHES THE OPPORTUNIST/GRIEFER STAGE
 - WHAT **PHYSICAL LAWS** OR **SOCIAL NORMS** APPLY?

THE MEETING WITH THE GODDESS

- NEXT, THE HERO EXPERIENCES AN UNCONDITIONAL **love** FOR A **GODDESS** FIGURE
- GODDESS REPRESENTS THE **TOTALITY OF KNOWLEDGE**
 - IF THE HERO ISN'T **CONSUMED** BY THE PROMISE OF SUCH KNOWLEDGE, IS **LIBERATED** BY IT
- MAPS ONTO SCIENTIST/NETWORKER STAGE
 - **EXPLORE** THE WORLD OR **ENQUIRE** OF ITS INHABITANTS
 - SWITCH FROM **ACTING** TO **INTERACTING**

WOMAN AS THE TEMPTRESS

- **“WOMAN”** IS A **METAPHOR** FOR THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE HERO'S **MUNDANE** LIFE
 - ANYTHING THAT MIGHT **DISTRACT** THE HERO FROM THE JOURNEY
- **TEMPTATION** IS TO RETURN TO OLD WAYS
 - IS THE HERO **PURE** ENOUGH TO CONTINUE?
 - REJECTS OLD SELF, COMMITS TO BECOMING NEW SELF
- POINT OF **CHANGE**
 - SWITCH BETWEEN SCIENTIST/NETWORKER AND POLITICIAN/PLANNER

ATONEMENT WITH THE FATHER

- MOST **IMPORTANT** STEP OF THE **ENTIRE** HERO'S JOURNEY
 - THE “GAME” PERIOD – WHAT THE VIRTUAL WORLD IS OSTENSIBLY “ABOUT”
- **“FATHER”** IS THE MOST **POWERFUL** ENTITY IN THE PLAYER'S EXISTENCE
 - IN VIRTUAL WORLD TERMS, PERSONIFIED AS THE (LEAD) DESIGNER
- HERO WANTS FATHER'S **ACCEPTANCE** THAT THEY ARE **WORTHY**

AT ONE MENT

- HOWEVER, THE FATHER **CAN'T BE DEFEATED** BY THOSE WHO **DON'T FIT** HIS DEFINITION OF **WORTHINESS**
- THE APPROACHING HERO MUST THEREFORE HAVE **FAITH**
- MOST **TRANSFORMATIVE** OF STEPS
 - CORRECTS WHATEVER *imbalance* DROVE THE HERO TO THE WORLD OF ADVENTURE IN THE **FIRST** PLACE
 - **EXTERNAL** VALIDATION BY FATHER IS SYMBOLIC OF **INTERNAL** VALIDATION BY THE HERO

MORE ON ATONEMENT...

- HERO REGAINS CONTROL OF OWN DESTINY BY MAKING **SELF** THE "FATHER"
 - FINALLY ABANDON WHO YOU **WERE** AND BECOME WHO YOU **ARE**
 - RECOGNITION THAT FAITH IN SELF IS **JUSTIFIED**
- CORRESPONDS TO POLITICIAN/PLANNER STAGE
 - **EFFECT** CHANGE BY ACTING ON WORLD, OR **AFFECT** CHANGE BY ACTING ON OTHER PLAYERS
- **BUT...**

UNFORTUNATELY...

- **MAJOR PROBLEM:** MOST VIRTUAL WORLDS DON'T DELIVER ATONEMENT
 - YOU CAN'T "WIN"
- (MORE ON THIS SHORTLY)

APOTHEOSIS

- **FINAL** STEP OF INITIATION PHASE
- HERO FEELS **PEACE AND FULFILMENT** WITH THE "OTHER WORLD"
- CORRESPONDS WITH FRIEND/HACKER STAGE
 - PLAYER FEELS **NO NEED** TO COMPETE AND ACHIEVE
- **NO LONGER** PLAYING A **GAME**
- ARE PLAYING TO **BE** WHO THEY ARE
 - INTERACT WITH **WORLD** FOR JOY OF KNOWING IT, WITH **PLAYERS** FOR JOY OF KNOWING THEM

IMPLICATIONS FOR DESIGN

- **LACK OF ATONEMENT**
 - DEVELOPERS ARE **AFRAID** TO TELL PLAYERS THEY'VE "WON" FOR FEAR THEY'LL STOP PLAYING
- ACTUALLY **WORSE** THIS WAY!
 - PLAYERS **STILL** LEAVE, OUT OF **FRUSTRATION**
 - TRAVEL TO **OTHER** VIRTUAL WORLDS LOOKING FOR ATONEMENT THEY'LL **NEVER GET**
 - JUDGE **ALL** THESE WORLDS BY THE STANDARDS OF THE FIRST, EVEN IF THAT ONE WAS **INFERIOR**
- **THERE IS A BETTER WAY!**

THE BETTER WAY!

- **GIVE** PLAYERS ATONEMENT – LET THEM **WIN!**
- PEOPLE KEEP PLAYING **LONG** AFTER THEY'VE "WON"
 - THEY DON'T **LEAVE** IT, THEY TAKE IT INTO THEIR **REALITY**
 - SOME MUD PLAYERS ARE STILL AROUND AFTER **15 YEARS!**
 - THE HERO'S JOURNEY TEMPLATE **EXPECTS** THIS
- IF YOU **LET** PEOPLE LEAVE WHEN THEY'VE REACHED THE TREADMILL'S END, THEY'LL **STAY**

OTHER REASONS...

- EVEN IF YOU DON'T **BUY** THE MONOMYTH ARGUMENT, IT **STILL** MAKES SENSE
- PEOPLE WHO **WANT** TO QUIT, BUT WHO CAN SEE A DEFINITE **END** POINT, WILL TRY TO REACH IT FIRST AND **THEN** QUIT
 - “LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL”
- ALSO, IS IT BETTER FOR PLAYERS TO LEAVE YOUR GAME WITH **POSITIVE** FEELINGS OF SUCCESS, OR **NEGATIVE** FEELINGS OF FRUSTRATION?
 - WHICH SORT WILL RECOMMEND YOUR WORLD TO THEIR **FRIENDS**?

MORE IMPLICATIONS

- **UNDESERVED** ATONEMENT
 - **ACHIEVEMENT** MUST NOT BE **UNDERMINED**
 - **COMMODIFICATION** IS LIKE CHEATING
- **PREMATURE** ATONEMENT
 - IF YOU WIN TOO EASILY, YOU FEEL LET DOWN
- **LACK** OF JOURNEY
 - NO WAY TO **MEASURE** SUCCESS MEANS NO HERO'S JOURNEY
 - BUT PLAYERS ARE GOOD AT **MAKING UP** MEASURES...

YET MORE IMPLICATIONS

- **MEANINGLESS** ATONEMENT
 - NOT EVERYONE **IS** WORTHY
 - SOME PEOPLE REALLY **DO** HAVE TO FAIL
 - IF IT'S JUST A MATTER OF **TIME** (OR MONEY), THE END RESULT IS **CERTAIN**, THEREFORE **BOGUS**
- PLAYERS **SAY** THEY WANT TO BE HEROES, BUT MANY JUST WANT TO BE **TREATED** HOW A HERO WOULD BE TREATED
 - THEY DON'T ACTUALLY WANT TO **BE** HEROES
 - IF THEY **DID**, THEY'D ACCEPT PERMANENT CHARACTER DEATH AS A CONCEPT...

SUMMARY

- [GAWD KNOWS HOW MANY SLIDES I'VE HAD TO SKIM THROUGH – SORRY FOLKS!]
- PLAYERS PLAY VIRTUAL WORLDS AS A MEANS OF **SELF-DISCOVERY**
- THEY DO SO BY **SUBCONSCIOUSLY** FOLLOWING A **PREDETERMINED** PATH (THE **HERO'S JOURNEY**) THAT THE ARCHITECTURE OF VIRTUAL WORLDS **OPENS UP** FOR THEM
- THIS PATH IS OFTEN **BLOCKED** BY MISGUIDED (ALBEIT UNDERSTANDABLE) **DESIGN** DECISIONS

CONCLUSION

- A FULLER APPRECIATION BY DESIGNERS OF THE **MEANING** AND **PURPOSE** OF THE HERO'S JOURNEY STEPS WOULD BE GREATLY BENEFICIAL
 - PLAYERS WILL **FINISH** THEIR JOURNEY
 - YET DEVELOPERS WOULD **KEEP** PLAYERS' CUSTOM
- **ADVICE** TO DESIGNERS:
 - GIVE PLAYERS A MEANINGFUL, DESERVED "**WIN**" CONDITION THAT ARRIVES AT THE RIGHT TIME
 - **PROTECT** THE ACHIEVEMENT METRIC
- IN **RETURN**, PLAYERS WILL GIVE **YOU** YOUR VIRTUAL WORLD