

EVOLUTION THROUGH REVOLUTION

NEW MMO GENRE POSSIBILITIES

VIRTUAL WORLDS FORUM

6TH OCTOBER 2008

PROF. RICHARD A. **BARTLE**

UNIVERSITY OF **ESSEX**

INTRODUCTION

- IN AN **INTERVIEW** EARLIER THIS YEAR, I WAS ASKED "ARE YOU PLANNING ON PLAYING GAMES LIKE *AGE OF CONAN* AND *WARHAMMER* WHEN THEY COME OUT?"
- MY **REPLY** BEGAN: "I'VE ALREADY PLAYED *WARHAMMER*. IT WAS CALLED *WORLD OF WARCRAFT*"
- THE OTHER **3,726** WORDS IN THE INTERVIEW DID NOT ATTRACT THE SAME DEGREE OF **PUBLICITY...**

EVOLUTION

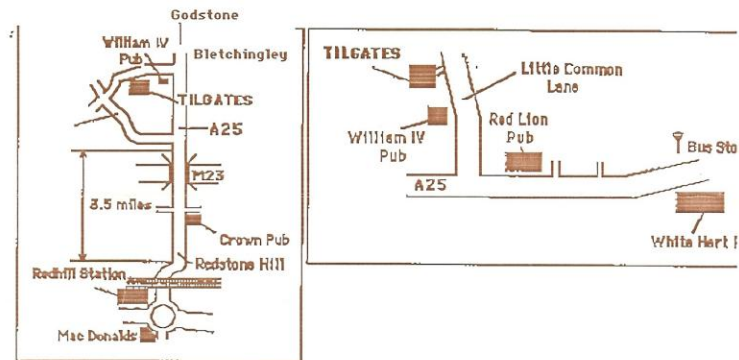
- ACTUALLY, I MADE THE REMARK TO **DEFEND** WAR, NOT TO **ATTACK** IT
 - WARCRAFT'S **IP** IS DERIVATIVE OF WARHAMMER'S
 - MARK JACOBS IS ONE OF THE VERY **FEW** DESIGNERS WHO **DOESN'T** COME FROM A *DIKUMUD* TRADITION
- THIS IS ALL **INCIDENTAL**, THOUGH
- THE POINT IS, ALMOST ALL THE POST-WOW MMOS **ARE** BASICALLY WOW WITH EVOLUTIONARY CHANGES
- WHERE ARE THE **REVOLUTIONARY** CHANGES?!

ADVENTURE '89

- **ADVENTURE '89** WAS A GATHERING IN THE UK OF **INDEPENDENT MUD/MUG/MUA/MU*/MMORPG/MMOG/MMO/PW/PEG/VIRTUAL WORLD DEVELOPERS**
- YES, IT TOOK PLACE IN **1989**...

Adventure '89 and Mugs Megameet

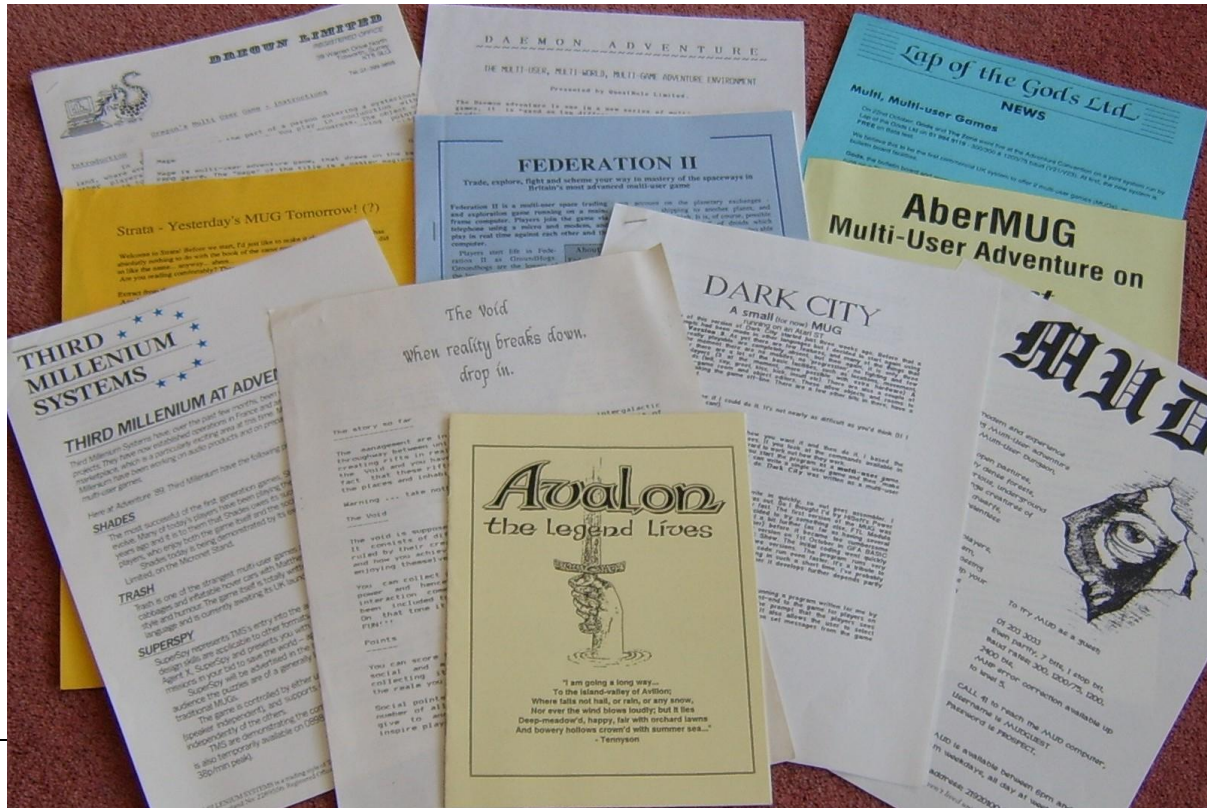
Tilgates
Little Common Lane
Bletchingley
Surrey
RH1 4QF
Tele: 0883 843219



"Tilgates" • Little Common Lane • Bletchingley • Surrey RH1 4QF • Telephone (0883) 843

IDEAS

- THE EVENT WAS A SHOWPLACE FOR **IDEAS**
- PERHAPS **20** VIRTUAL WORLDS WERE SHOWN, ALL OF THEM **Different**



RANGE

- WHEN I **SAY** THE VIRTUAL WORLDS WERE ALL DIFFERENT, I **MEAN** IT:
 - *FEDERATION II* - SPACE OPERA
 - *THE ZONE* - ADULT (SCORE TO SCORE)
 - *DARK CITY* - CYBERPUNK
 - *STRAT* - HOLIDAY ON THE MOON
 - *TRASH* - "FIRE-BREATHING **CABBAGES** AND INFLATABLE HOVER-CARS"
 - *VOID* - MAGICAL ADULT
 - *PRODIGY* - ANCIENT BRITAIN
 - *EMPYRION* - UNDERWATER CITY
 - *SPACERS* - GENERATION SPACESHIP

FANTASY

- EVEN THE **FANTASY** WORLDS WEREN'T ALL THE **SAME**
 - GODS – END GAME PLAYERS CAN CREATE OBJECTS USING POINTS GIVEN BY WORSHIPPERS
 - MIRRORWORLD – ROLLING RESETS
 - AVALON – GRID-BASED IN PLACES
 - BLOODSTONE – OBJECT DECOMPOSITION (HUMANS MADE OF **260** PARTS)
 - AMP – OBJECTS WITH SHAPE
 - STRATA – INTERNAL CURRENCY
 - WARLORD – HIGHLY COMBAT-INTENSIVE

COMPARISON

- THESE **GAME** WORLDS WERE AS DIFFERENT AS WOW AND EVE ONLINE
 - ACTUALLY, VOID WAS MORE A **SOCIAL** WORLD – CLOSER TO SECOND LIFE
- WHY CAN'T WE HAVE **EQUALLY** DIFFERENT WORLDS **NOW**?
 - WHY DO WE ONLY GET **INCREMENTAL** CHANGE?
- EVOLUTIONARY CHANGES ARE **GOOD**, BUT THEY ARRIVE AT A **SNAIL'S** PACE
- TO ATTRACT **PLAYERS**, WE NEED **VARIETY**

NO EXCUSE

- THE **STANDARD** REASON GIVEN FOR **LACK** OF INNOVATION IS THAT DEVELOPING VIRTUAL WORLDS IS TOO **EXPENSIVE** TO TAKE RISKS
- WELL **HA!** HERE IS AN **INCOMPLETE** LIST OF **SOCIAL** WORLDS YOU CAN PLAY **RIGHT NOW**:
 - *KANEVA, YOVILLE, ROCKETON, PROTOTERRA, GAIA ONLINE, HIPIHI, GOOGLE LIVELY, HABBO HOTEL, LAGUNA BEACH, WHYVILLE, TWINITY, CYWORLD, FOOTBALL SUPERSTARS, WEBLIN, IMVU, SECOND LIFE, CLUB PENGUIN, ACTIVE WORLDS, VSIDE, BARBIE ONLINE, AMAZING WORLDS, WEBKINZ, WORLDS.COM, EXIT REALITY*
 - FOR A VIDEO DEMO OF ALL THESE AND MORE, CHECK OUT [HTTP://WWW.JUSTVIRTUAL.COM/SVWS_2008.MP4](http://www.justvirtual.com/svws_2008.mp4)
- IF **SOCIAL** WORLDS CAN DO IT, WHY NOT **GAME** WORLDS?

GENRES

- MUCH AS I'D LIKE TO DISCUSS NEW **GAMEPLAY** IDEAS HERE, I DON'T HAVE A LONG ENOUGH **SLOT**
 - **LUCKILY** FOR YOU...
- I **DO** HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO LOOK AT **GENRES**, THOUGH
- BY GENRE, I MEAN THE CLASSES OF **FICTION** THAT **SUPPORT** A GAME WORLD
 - I **DON'T** MEAN MMORPG V MMORTS V MMOFPS V MMOCCG V MMOMMO V BLAH BLAH BLAH

CURRENT GENRES

- **CURRENTLY** POPULAR GENRES FOR VIRTUAL WORLDS ARE:
 - FANTASY
 - SCIENCE FICTION
 - MORE FANTASY
 - EVEN **MORE** FANTASY
- FANTASY IS AN **EXCELLENT** GENRE FOR VIRTUAL WORLDS, BUT IT'S TOO CROWDED A MARKET
- WHAT **OTHER** GENRES MIGHT WORK?

IMPORTANT POINT

- DESIGNERS DO **NOT** CREATE WORLDS THAT THEY WANT TO PLAY
- DESIGNERS CREATE WORLDS THAT **PEOPLE** WANT TO PLAY
- THEREFORE, IN **SELECTING** A GENRE YOU SHOULD CONSIDER WHAT **SEGMENT** OF THE POPULATION WILL **PLAY** THE RESULT
 - OR, IF THE **DESIGN** POSSIBILITIES ARE JUST TOO APPEALING TO **IGNORE**, AT LEAST PERSUADE YOURSELF THAT **SOMEONE** WILL PLAY IT...

EXAMPLE 1

- MANY **RETIRED** PEOPLE HAVE INTERNET ACCESS
- THEY WOULD BE ATTRACTED TO A GENRE THAT:
 - ISN'T **VIOLENT**
 - RELIES ON **BRAINS** RATHER THAN BRAWN
 - WILL PRIMARILY ATTRACT **OTHER** RETIRED PEOPLE
- OTHER BUTTONS THAT MIGHT **ALSO** WORK
 - A HANKERING FOR AN IDYLIC PAST
 - AN OPULENT OR RURAL SETTING SO
- **SO**, THAT'S AN AGATHA CHRISTIE WORLD, THEN!

RESKINNING

- NOW IF YOU **WANTED** TO, YOU COULD **RESKIN** REGULAR MMO FEATURES FOR THIS GENRE
 - TANK: THE **INTERROGATOR** WHO HAS TO KEEP SUSPECTS **DISTRACTED** WITH SMALLTALK, FLIRTING, DISCUSSION OF THEIR INTERESTS, PHYSICAL **PRESENCE**
 - DPS: **INVESTIGATOR** LOOKING FOR **CLUES** WHILE THE SUSPECT IS DISTRACTED
 - HEALER: THE PERSON WHOSE FROWNS AND **TUT-TUTS** STOP THE SUSPECT FROM DOING ANYTHING SOCIALLY GAUCHE (SUCH AS BREAKING OFF CONVERSATION WITH THE TANK)
 - ROGUE: THE GENTLEMAN/WOMAN **THIEF** WHO BREAKS INTO HOUSES, **DESKS**, SAFES, CARS ETC. WITH ONLY CHARISMA AS A DEFENCE SHOULD SERVANTS **WITNESS** THE ACTION

BENEFIT

- HOWEVER, THE GENRE'S **FICTION** NATURALLY SUGGESTS **NEW** GAMEPLAY POSSIBILITIES
 - CASE-BASED RATHER THAN QUEST-BASED
 - IMPLIES SOME **PROCEDURAL** GENERATION OF CASES
 - IMPLIES MANY CASES ARE **INSTANCED**
 - SOCIAL WORLD OF 1930S AS A **BACKDROP**
 - COULD BECOME **DOMINANT** GAMEPLAY FOR SOME
 - **SKILL**-BASED, RATHER THAN LEVEL/CLASS-BASED
 - BUT **MAYBE** SOCIAL XP LEADING TO SOCIAL LEVELS?
 - POTENTIAL TO ACCOUNT FOR **AFK** IN GAMEPLAY!
 - **ESPIONAGE** AS AN END GAME?

MORE

Female, divorced, mid-30s, two children, WLTM new MMO. Highly literate, good education, comfortable with technology. Not fond of violence but is OK if it's cartoony. Loves history, finds elves so-so. GSOH. Serious enquiries only.

- MORE EXAMPLES ARE EASY TO COME BY
- SO ... SHE **ACHES** FOR WHAT ONCE WAS AND HOPES FOR WHAT **COULD** ONCE MORE BE; SHE PREFERS **MIND** OVER MUSCLE, THE **SUBTLE** OVER THE CRASS; KEY WORD IS **INTRIGUE**
- THAT SAYS **SCARLET PIMPERNEL** ERA
 - OR ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE, WHERE MEN GO OFF TO FIGHT WHILE WOMEN STAY TO RUN THE COUNTRY

BOTTOM UP

- STARTING WITH A TARGET PLAYER
DEMOGRAPHIC AND THINKING OF A GAME TO **FIT** IS JUST **ONE** WAY TO DO IT
 - THIS IS THE **TOP DOWN** APPROACH
- **ANOTHER** IS STARTING WITH AN **IDEA** AND TRYING TO FIGURE OUT TO WHOM IT WOULD **APPEAL**
 - THIS IS THE **BOTTOM UP** APPROACH
- YOU'D USE BOTTOM UP IF YOU SAW WONDROUS GAME DESIGN **POTENTIAL** IN A CONCEPT

EXAMPLE 2

- **ESCAPE** FROM A PRISONER OF WAR CAMP
 - THIS WOULD ATTRACT SOME OF THE MORE **EXPLORER-**TYPE AND **CRAFTING**-ORIENTED PLAYERS WHO ARE **ILL-SERVED** BY TODAY'S COMBAT-ORIENTED MMOs.
- THE GAMEPLAY WOULD CONCERN **SNEAKING** AND HIDING AND **DISTRACTING**, RATHER THAN COMBAT
 - BECAUSE THE **GUARDS** HAVE **GUNS** AND YOU DON'T
- WHEN YOU REACH **BLIGHTY**, IT'S **GAME OVER**
 - LEAVE ON A **HIGH**, NOT THROUGH **FRUSTRATION**
- THE SUBJECT MATTER WOULD PROBABLY **LIMIT** IT TO POST-RUNEQUEST TEENAGE **BOYS**, THOUGH

EXAMPLE 3

- WORLD OF THE **THREE MUSKETEERS**
 - PRE-REVOLUTIONARY **FRANCE**
 - HONOURABLE **SOLDIERS** COMPETE TO RESOLVE THE **INTRIGUES** OF THE PALACE, THE CARDINAL, FOREIGN POWERS AND THE ARISTOCRACY
- A WORLD WHERE SOCIAL STATUS **MATTERS**
 - PEOPLE JUDGE YOU BY YOUR **RANK** AND YOUR MISTRESS, AS **WELL** AS THE QUALITY OF YOUR CHARACTER
- WOULD APPEAL TO MANY PEOPLE AGED **30+**
- HAS A HIGHER-THAN-USUAL DRAW FOR **WOMEN**
 - ALTHOUGH THE FACT THEY WOULDN'T ACTUALLY GET TO **PLAY** A WOMAN RATHER UNDERMINES THIS...

MORE I

- THIS **SUMMER**, I HAD A CONSULTANCY JOB IN WHICH I WAS ASKED TO PRODUCE SOME GENRE IDEAS FOR PARTICULAR TARGET AUDIENCES
- HERE'S THE **RESULT**:
 - ROBIN HOOD
 - LONDON, 1966
 - SPY FICTION (JAMES BOND)
 - ESCAPIST ADVENTURE (INDIANA JONES)
 - AGE OF IMPERIALISM (FLASHMAN)
 - HARDBOILED DETECTIVE (SAM SPADE)
 - GANGSTERS/FBI (1920S CHICAGO)
 - KOREAN WAR (MASH)
 - ANCIENT ROME

MORE 2

- AGE OF EXPLORATION
- MOTORBIKE GANGS
- ESCAPE FROM JURASSIC PARK
- KNITTING
- GARDENING
- CRAFTING GREETINGS CARDS
- LAZY STUDENTS
- PIMPS & PROSTITUTES
- RAMPAGING JAPANESE MONSTERS
- CRUISE SHIP CHAOS
- WILD WEST OUTLAWS
- MILLIONAIRE STREET
- 1001 ARABIAN NIGHTS/SCEHEREZADE
- THE EVE OF THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR
- RENAISSANCE EUROPE

MORE 3

- EXPLORATION OF AFRICA
 - THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE
 - ASIMOV'S FOUNDATION SERIES
 - COLONISATION OF NORTH AMERICA (FROM POINT OF VIEW OF NATIVES)
 - PUZZLE PIRATES IN SPACE
 - STEAMPUNK
 - CELEBRITY GOSSIP MAGAZINE LIFETYLE SPOOF
 - CASANOVA'S VENICE
 - WORLD WAR I ESPIONAGE (RILEY, ACE OF SPIES)
 - VICTORIAN GRAND TOURS OF EUROPE
 - MODERN LIVING PARODY
 - VICTORIAN VAMPIRES
 - 1950S SCIENCE FICTION (BUG-EYED MONSTERS)
- THOSE ARE JUST THE ONES THAT **MATCHED** THE TARGET GROUPS – THERE ARE **HUNDREDS** OF OTHERS

CONCLUSION

- **MUCH MORE** CAN BE DONE WITH VIRTUAL WORLDS THAN **FANTASY/SF**
 - OR **MODERN** ERA, FOR NON-GAME WORLDS
 - OR **CUTESY** FOR KIDS' WORLDS
- A **CHANGE** OF FICTION GENRE CAN **ITSELF** NATURALLY SUGGEST **NEW** GAMEPLAY IDEAS
- IT'S NOT A CASE OF EVOLUTION **OR** REVOLUTION
 - YOU CAN HAVE **BOTH**
- PEOPLE **SHOULDN'T** HAVE TO PLAY THE SAME GAME OVER AND OVER AND OVER **AGAIN**