

IT'S ALL GAMES NOW

the convergence of games and social media



Raph Koster
VP Creative Design



Once upon a time...



There was a surreal kingdom
inhabited by wondrous creatures.

The magic circle

They lived inside a **magic circle**: a shimmering barrier put up by powerful magicians.

It was transparent, but hard, like glass.





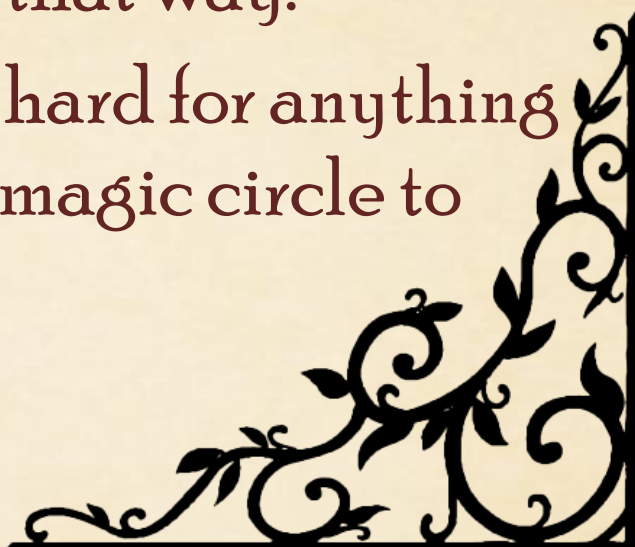
Outside the magic circle of this kingdom was the **wild world** – called wild because unlike the kingdom, it was not controlled by **rules**.



Stuff that happened in the wild world **didn't count** for much inside. The magic circle the sorcerers had put in made it that way.



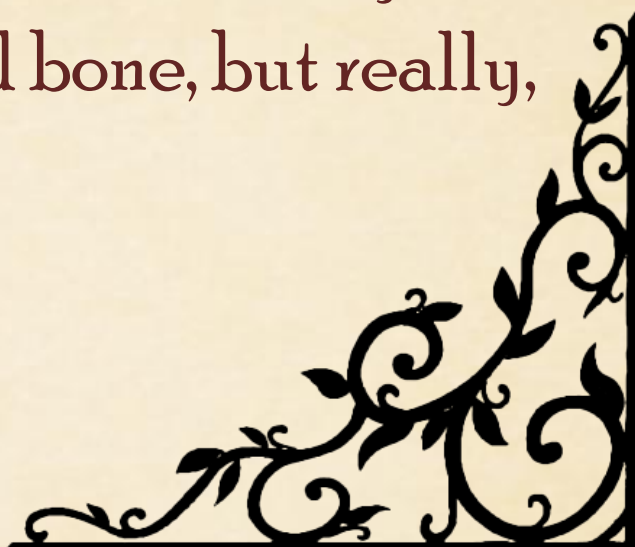
It was really hard for anything inside the magic circle to get out.





A fascinating thing about the critters
was that they were **made of math**.

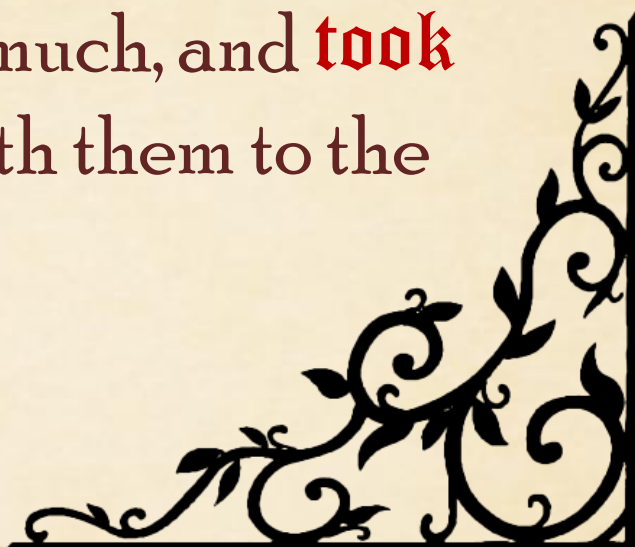
Oh, they might have looked like they
were made of flesh and bone, but really,
they weren't.





Only a few people came into the magic circle and played with these amazing creatures.

And they often learned much, and **took that learning back** with them to the wild world.





But the wild world grew more
civilized with time.

And eventually, its borders came right up
to the very edge of the magic circle,
and something **frightening** happened.





The circle began to **leak**.





Scrabulous

To use the Scrabble cheat-o-matic, enter the letters you have below. Add any additional letters of places on the board that look promising to get a list of all the possible words that you can play. The Scrabble cheat-o-matic only handles single blank tiles, so in the unlikely event you have both blanks, tough. To enter a blank tile, use the _ (underscore) character.

Letters:

Dictionary:



Cheat-O-Matic



“Charlton said that since the debut of Facebook Scrabulous in June, the Cheat-O-Matic has seen its traffic go from about 4,000 page views a day to more than 120,000. Charlton points out that the site gets only about 17,000 unique visitors -- only a small fraction of the number of Scrabulous' 400,000 active players. But that also means that each visitor is running the calculator an average of seven times a day.”

– *L.A. Times, Jan 6, 2008*



Scrabulous



“After inputting the board and my letters –

I-BLANK-A-T-U-E-D

– the program spit back the ideal move: **DEUTZIA** for 73 points. Nevermind I had no idea what a deutzia was.”



Strategy Guides



“There is a very significant difference between reading a strategy guide and buying money or characters. The former educates you on how to be a better player, sending you out into the virtual wilds to do the work yourself. The latter takes the game out of your hands and supplies you with the end result of the labours.”

- Ten Ton Hammer, Dec 29, 2007

Strategy Guides



“Getting information is not introducing an artificial mechanic to the game. It does not give one player an advantage over the other because all players have access to this information from various free and paid sources. The same can be said about RMT...different players can afford differing amounts of gold, and some can’t afford any at all. Having that information available to all players is key to this, because that may not have been the case back in the days of the MUD.”

- The Common Sense Gamer, Dec 27th, 2007

***MUD** etiquette*



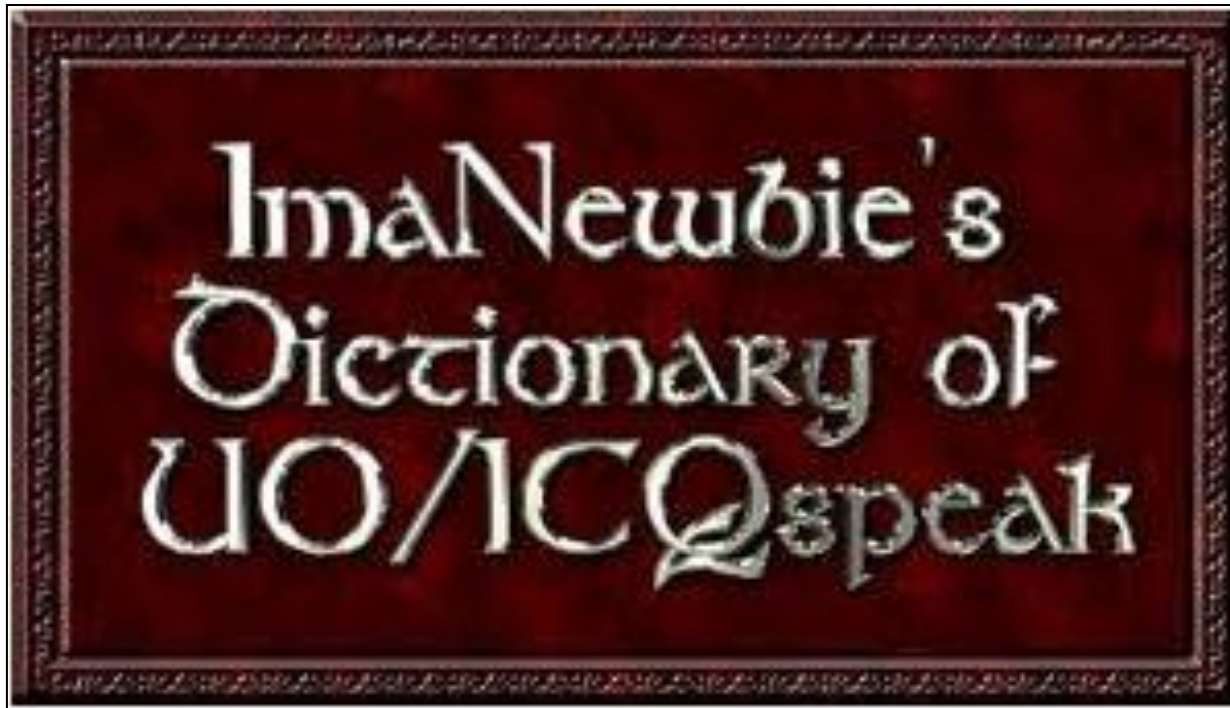
(Sorry guys, but yes, back in the mud days, you could be banned for publicly disclosing the steps to a quest.)



“It was probably a lot more fun,” he said,
“when I knew that I was the only person on
the Internet that had the potential to use it
as a cheat.”

- the anonymous creator of ScrabbleWordFinder.com





Global chat

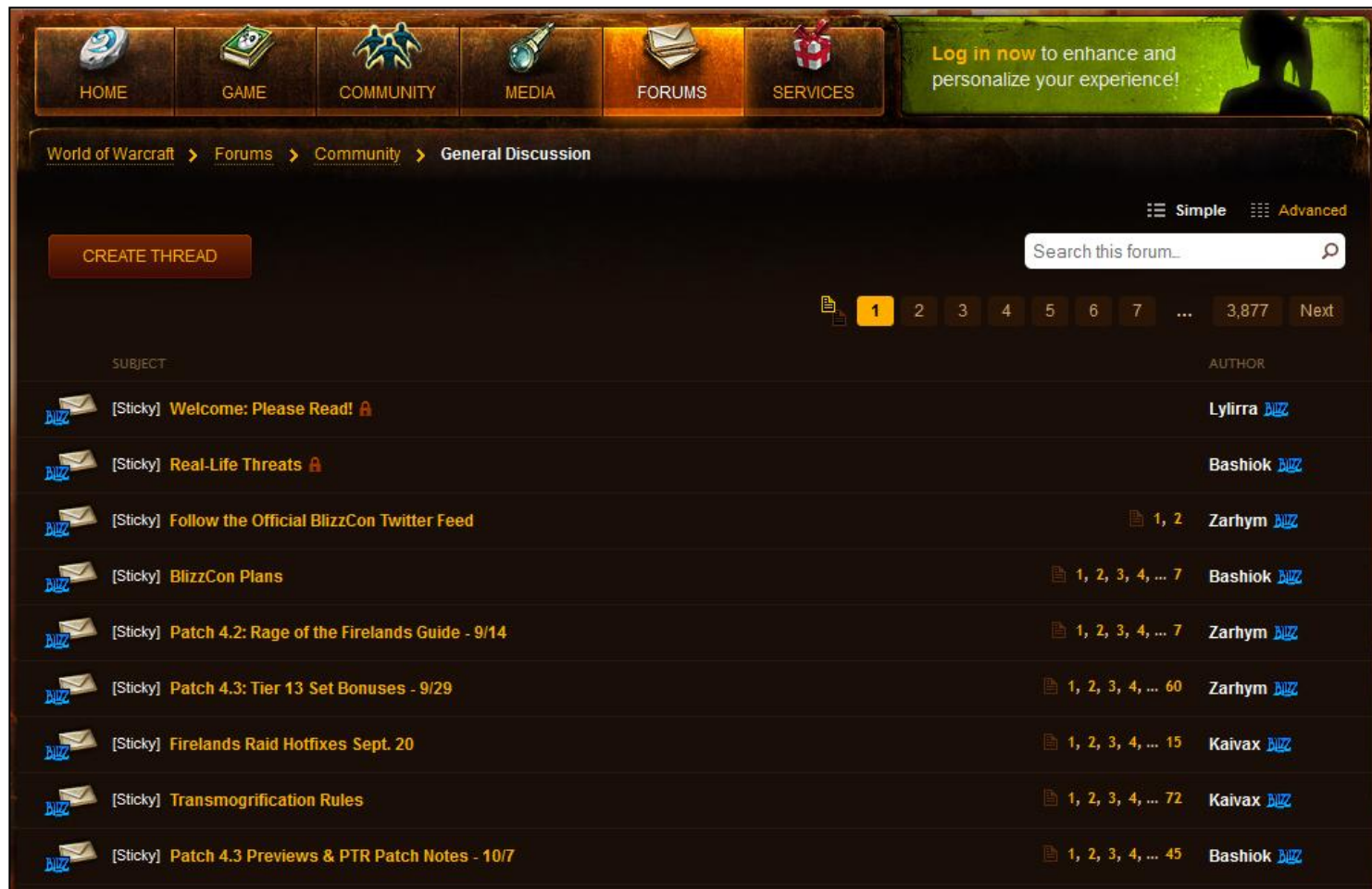
Guilds



- Original *Ultima Online* did not have guild support.
- Players actually created new characters just to stick their guild affiliations in their names.
- Quitting the guild meant permadeath!



- So I had to code a guild system. Broke the server.



Forums

A directory board holding both news and 'welcome' information stands here.

(1)	Kae	Contact list	11/Aug/24 [13]
(2)	Scirocco	Word Association Game!	11/Aug/20 [41]
(3)	T'Aleydras	Quimby...	11/Aug/16 [38]
(4)	Mikhail	The squad wants you!	10/Nov/12
(5)	Lucifer	Crazy Coupon Giveaway!	11/May/27 [3]
(6)	Lilian	3	11/Aug/25 [6]
(7)	Gideon	A New Order of Knights	11/Aug/27 [5]
(8)	DRevil	equipment and experience	11/Sep/04
(9)	Zoroaster	dont open mail form blackmojo7@hotmail	11/Sep/04
(10)	Brew	Attention aspiring newbie wizards:	11/Sep/06 [2]
(11)	Lamia	And so we reach the end.	11/Sep/14 [8]
(12)	Ioakim	Ptah with an interesting concept...	11/Sep/11 [2]
(13)	Ra'id	Attention unclanned PKERS!!	11/Sep/14 [2]
(14)	Cruise	needing a few eq pieces	11/Sep/11 [1]
(15)	Brew	Boards	11/Oct/10 [1]
(16)	Brew	Herb Shoppe	11/Oct/11 [1]

(4) From: Mikhail Title: The squad wants you!
 Posted On: Friday, November 12 2010, 02:20AM

Hi,

The squad has been around for a long time. Due to the real world many of us were/are absent for a long time. Therefore our numbers shrank. Sad story.

But after having dealt with the most harassing rl-world issues I am back and pretty regularly active again.



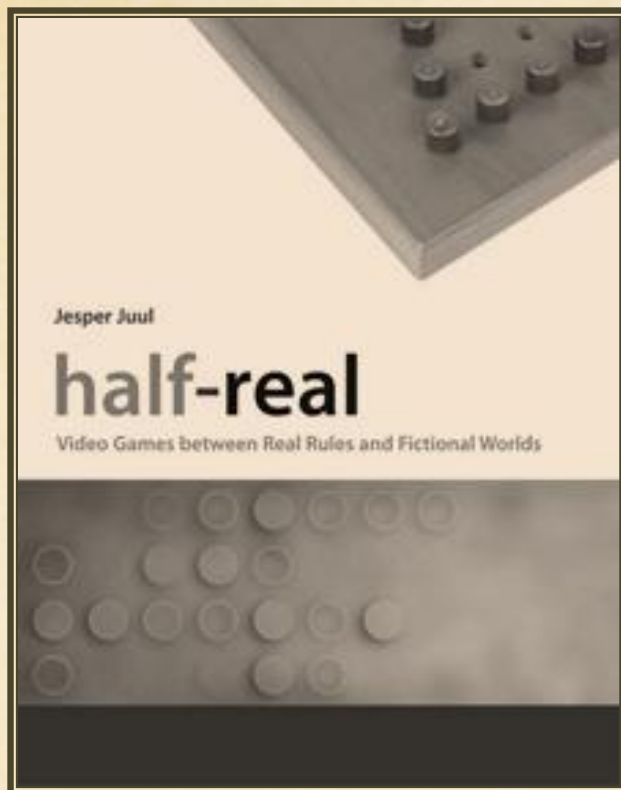
Ultima Online in-game message board



Back to our story...

The wild world geographers came
from far and wide to measure the circle,
and to test its permeability.

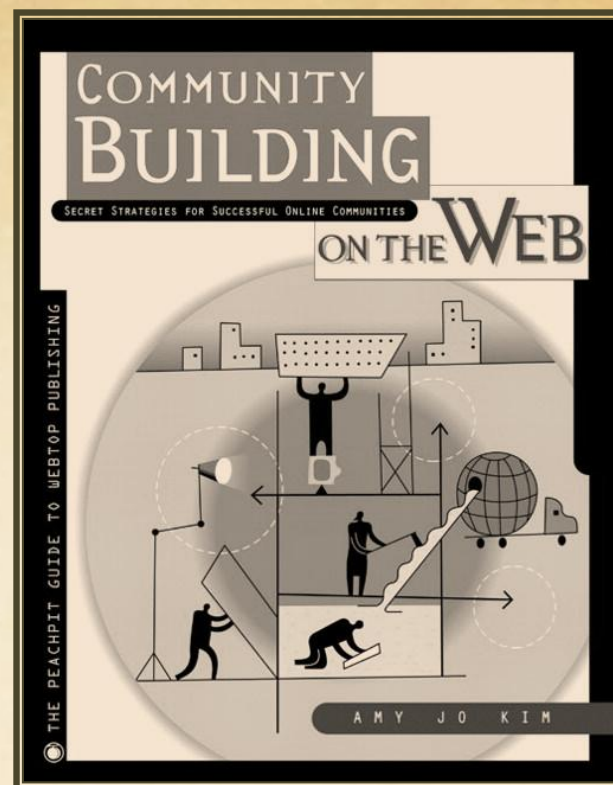




Some of them were merely **curious** as to how exactly things worked inside.



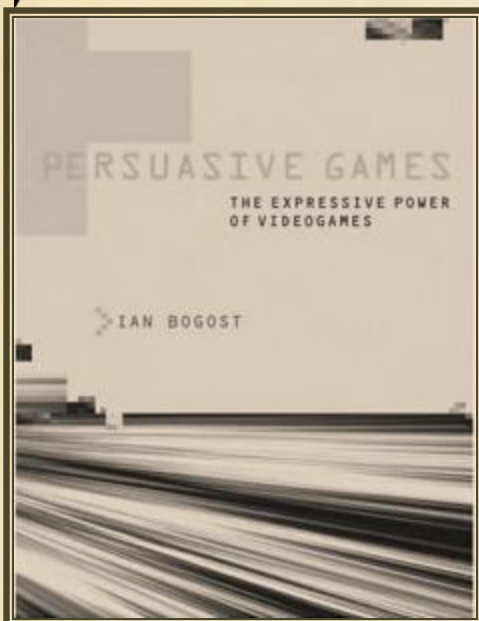
Some of them gently worked to show the citizens of the magic land the many **wonderful** things that could come from working with the wild world.



Once upon a cow...

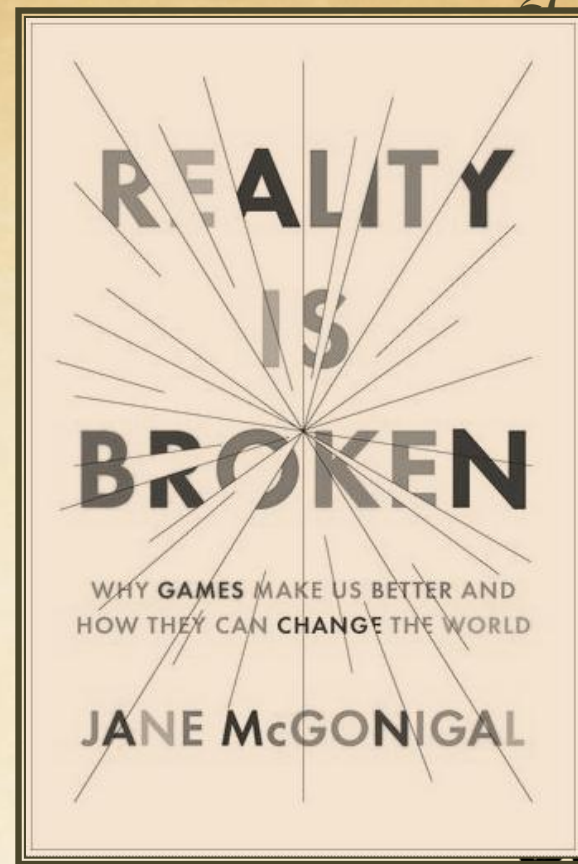


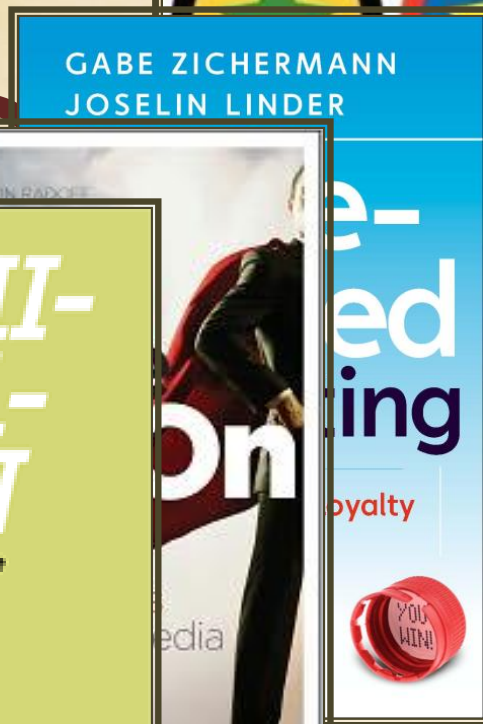
Some of them cast mighty, impenetrable spells against it to try to force it open! They got **sucked into it** instead, and eventually **raptured**.





Some of the wizards from inside the magic circle tried to push the circle outwards and make it **bigger**, out of idealism; to change the wild world into a place where rules once again applied for the good of everyone.

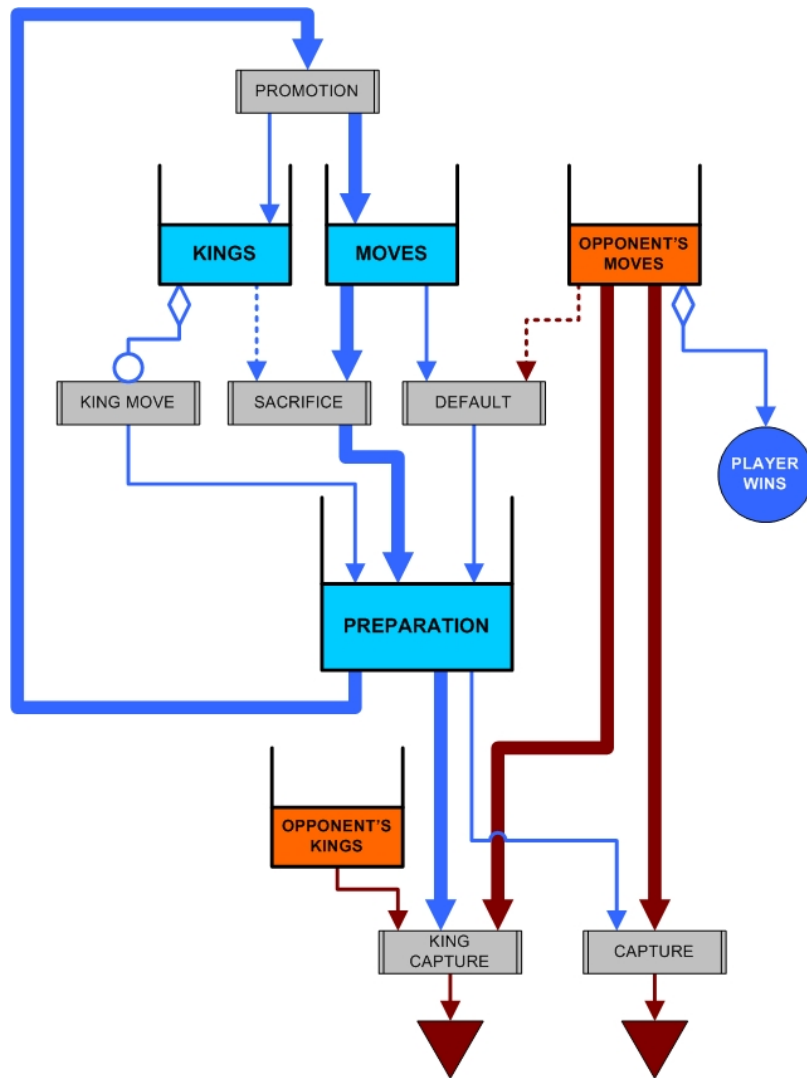




The science worked



We now understand far more about how games work than we did ten years ago.



A Game Grammar by Stéphane Bura

<http://www.stephanebura.com/diagrams/>

We also co-opted other sciences



- Identity
 - Signaling
 - Roles
 - Profiles
 - Reputation
 - Credentials
- Clusters
 - Ad hoc groups
 - Tribal identity
- Trade
 - Power laws
- Societies
 - Weak ties
 - Trust
 - Governance
 - History
- Communication channels
 - Synchronous
 - Asynchronous



Social Mechanics
The Engines Behind
Everything Multiplayer



Raph Koster
VP Creative Design
Playdom

Individuals



- Identity formation

Particularly notable during adolescent years, as identity exploration results in association with memetic tribes.

- Signaling theory

Premise: that we consciously and unconsciously select to **display our psychological traits** publicly to attract mates, tribes, and determine relative standing.

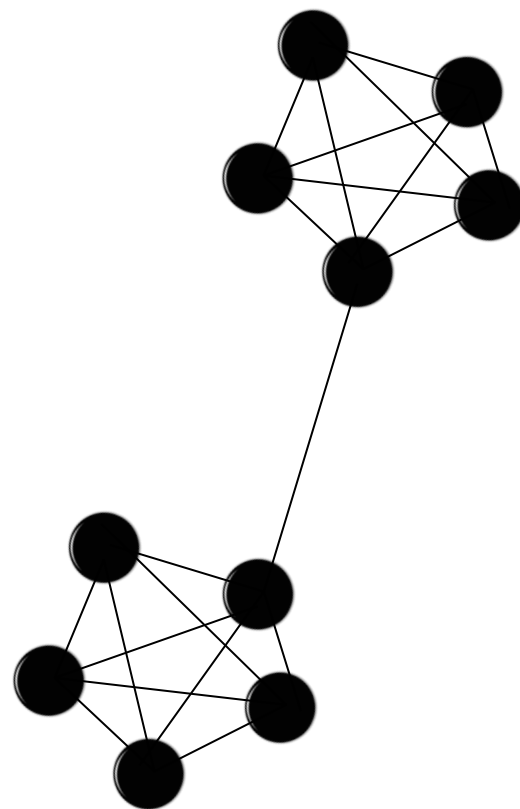
- Roles

Provides each individual a reason to **specialize**, and thereby webs the individual more tightly into the community as a whole.

Clusters



- Individuals tend to web together into social networks that are “lumpy.”
 - Plenty of other material out there on this topic.
- Clusters exhibit **homogeneity**
 - Of genetics (family/tribe networks), of ideas
- Clusters tend to be densely webbed and have “**strong man**” leaders
 - Hierarchy and law emerges with scale.



Economics

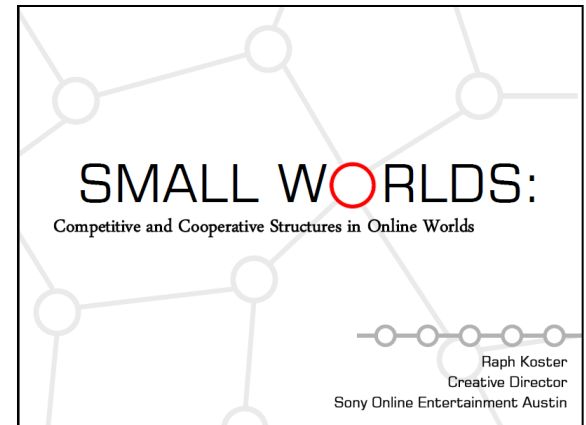


- Organization is a means of caloric maximization.
 - A method of extracting greater value from limited resources.
 - In the end, this is what drives community formation.
- Gini Coefficient structures emerge.
 - Wealth distribution is always unequal; excessive inequality leads to social unrest.
- **Power laws** manifest in all sorts of ways.

Society



- **Weak ties** manifest as important as the network achieves scale.
 - Classic example is how you obtain jobs.
 - Weak ties serve to bridge clusters.
- **Social class** instead of hierarchy develops.
- **Trust** and **faith** and **social contract**.
 - Law theoretically works to keep these in balance.
- **History** begins to be needed.



Contextual vs non-contextual



- Contextual methods are ones that are explained within the game fiction.
- Non-contextual ones are bolted on, with no justification provided.
 - Many of these are within the game, despite being non-contextual.
 - Often supported via the game ecology, rather than by the game proper; for example, forums on the web.

Synchronous vs asynchronous



- Synchronous methods occur in near-realtime.
 - You have to be there to get the message.
 - Messages are not persistent.
- Asynchronous methods are post-and-retrieve.
 - Messages are persisted.
 - Recipients do not need to be present at the time.

Spatial broadcast



- Synchronous, usually contextual
- “Say”: limited range broadcast to multiple recipients
- “Talk”: like say, but one recipient called out publicly as the intended recipient
- “Whisper”: like talk, but message is garbled for any but the recipient, unless skills or proximity override
- Moods, to increase the bandwidth of communication and puppeteering capability.

Peer to peer



- Instant messages sent to single recipients.
- Generally synchronous
- Almost always non-contextual
 - Some games explain it with psionics or communicators
- “Tell” is the classic command
 - May add AFK buffers, answering machines, etc, making it asynch
- ICQ/IM is a more complex variant that becomes asynch

Multichannel broadcast



- Synchronous system.
- Subscribe to channels to receive text, rather than using distance
- Almost always non-contextual
- Static chat channels are the standard implementation
- Can also support dynamic conferencing

Asynch peer to peer



Messages sent to a mailbox to be retrieved later.

- Embedded mail systems used to be common in virtual worlds but have faded away.
- AFK systems in instant messaging systems accomplish the same thing
- Almost always non-contextual

Asynch broadcast



- Persistent messages broadcast to multiple people
- Most text muds support embedded bulletin board systems
 - But commercial games have tended not to.
- May have “channels” like chat by using different boards
- Boards often tied to locations (thus contextual) but not always.

A grid of comm channels



	1 to 1	1 to many	Many to many
<i>Synchronous</i>	Tell IM	Shout	Chat IRC
<i>Asynchronous</i>	Email Messages	Wall Twitter	Forums

Synchronous grouping



- Players working as a team to accomplish a goal.
- In sports, competitive PvP games, and MMOs this is a standard mechanic.
 - Typically accompanied by communication channels.

Persistent social structures



- Creating persistent associations of users that the game is aware of.
- In the absence of game support, players will create these anyway using external facilities.
 - *Ultima Online*
 - *Quake*

Avatars, characters and profiles



- *Avatar*: best regarded as the appearance presented by a given player in the environment.
- *Character*: originated as the **statistical** description of a given player's in-world proxy.
- *Profile*: typically refers to the **non-statistical** elements.

Avatar Attributes



- Tangible attributes
 - Things that affect the physics of the game world in some manner
 - What we tend to think of as “stats”
- *This is how **the server** relates to an avatar.*
- Intangible attributes
 - Leadership, charisma, prejudices, eloquence.
- *This is how **other players** relate to the avatar.*

Components of profiles



- Name
- Description
- Tangible attributes (maybe how healthy they are)
- A list of equipment
- Some degree of history (levels achieved)
- Perhaps a reputation (criminal flag, etc)

Classes as modes of expression



- Classes, roles, and many other intangible elements are quantified by selecting a prepackaged appearance and competency.
 - This allows for users to easily do crude self-sorting into affinity groups.
 - It also allows for instant **interdependence** dynamics.
- Essentially, these choices are **modes of expression** for users, transforming the intangible into the tangible.

Pseudonymity



- Going back to early ARPANET, **pseudonyms** were common.
- Games leveraged both magic circle and the roleplaying tradition to embrace pseudonymity as well.
- Shown to reduce grief behavior over anonymity, albeit not to the degree that known identity does.
 - Many classic cases where unmasking caused greater grief.

Badge systems vs achievements



- Also trying to quantify intangibles.
 - Badges were born originally as **a history** of past significant achievements.
 - Achievements instead become **a meta-game**, but still provide signaling value.
- Think of analogy to real world educational degrees
 - More useful for indicating character than skill.

Reputation systems



- A means of **quantifying player opinions** of other players based on atomic interactions.
 - They spiral out of control when you use negative ratings
 - They gain credibility over time when you use positive ones
 - But punish those with little history in the system

Large scale structures



- Hierarchy
 - Formalized **authority** roles for in-game social structures.
- Sense of history
 - Extremely common to see passionate users creating giant history sites about their tribe or guild
- Migration to the real
 - The **true measure of success** in community building

Governance



Hmm, governance didn't migrate out.





98%

of Americans use social media
today.

510,000

comments per minute.

293,000

status updates per minute.

136,000

photos uploaded per minute.

694,000

“shared items” (as opposed to
authored) per minute.



Game version Social media version



Say	Wall
Public chat	Twitter
Tell	IM
Board	Forum
Mail	Message
In-game item	Gifting
Guild	Group
Intangible reputation	Klout
Badges	Achievements
Trade	RMT
Content creation	Content curation
Assistance	Quora
Classes and levels	LinkedIn
Auction houses	eBay
Gold coins	Facebook credits
Stats	Quantified self
Friends list	Circles

What games do to our brains



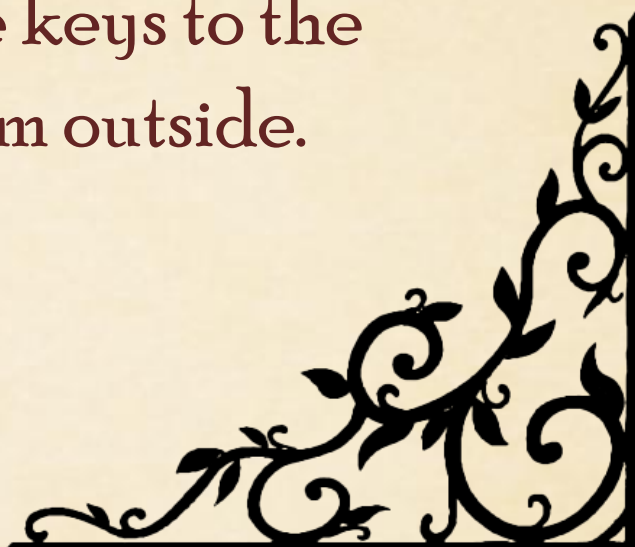
- They teach us to **quantify**.
- They teach us to be **reductionist**.
- They teach us that **everything can be solved** – indeed, there is a “right answer.”





**The tale resumes its
onward march...**

It was then that the mages who lived
inside the magic circle realized that
they had handed the keys to the
kingdom to those from outside.

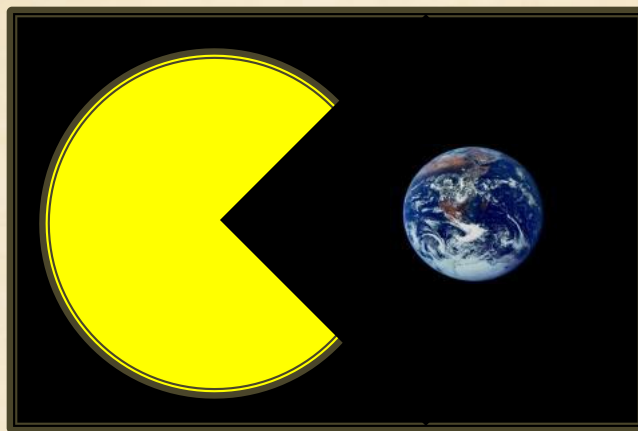




The circle did indeed begin to grow,
but as it grew, the shimmering blue
light also grew dimmer.



Some called it the
World-swallowing.



But no one was sure which world was the eater, and which world the consumed.

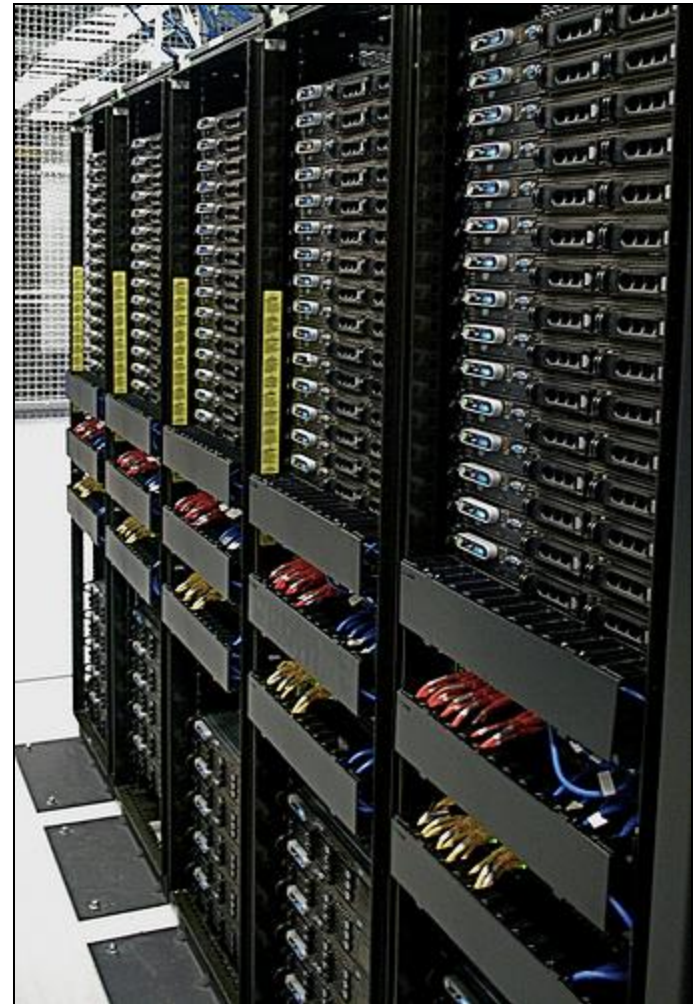
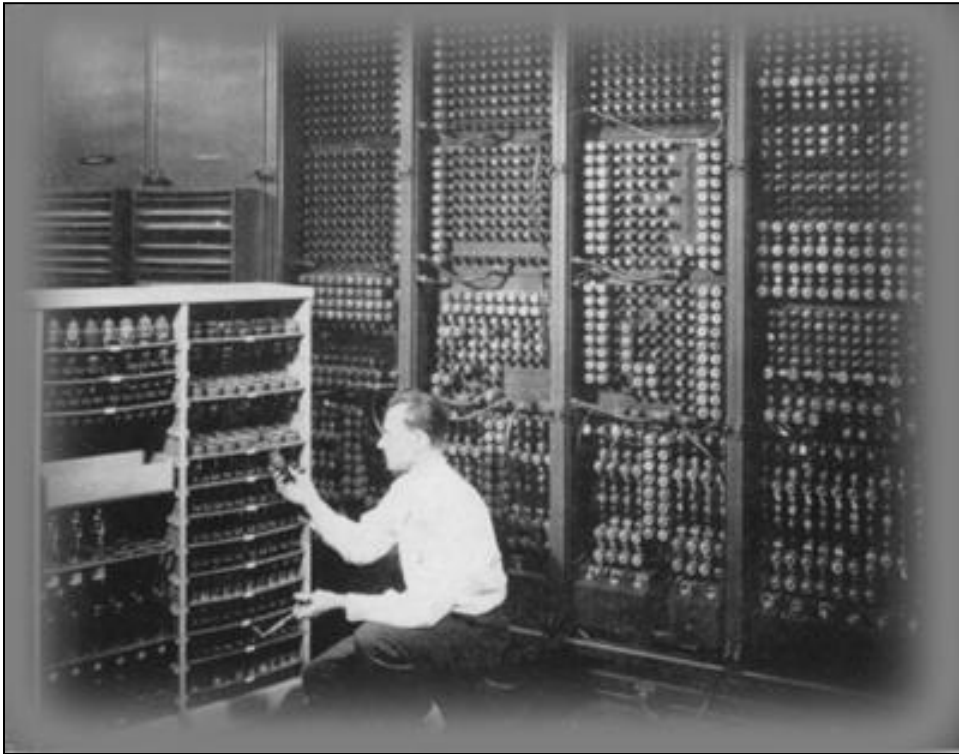




iCloud



The Cloud



The local

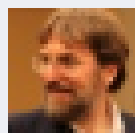




Raph Koster

Wonder how long til the pendulum swings again, cloud will be seen as slow like mainframes, and native apps will be hot. Always happens...

 Like · Comment · [@raphkoster on Twitter](#) · September 28 at 4:51pm via Twitter



Neil Kirby When bandwidth is cheaper the CPU, you get mainframes/cloud. When CPU is cheaper than bandwidth, you get PC/Client-server/native app. All for various values of "cheap." Or think of it in terms of enabling; a little more CPU enables a new balance. Then a little more bandwidth enables a different balance point. This is not a whole lot different than the basic research on memory hierarchy from the 1960s - see the IBM Journal of R&D.
September 29 at 7:37am · Like



The pendulum



It means **someone else** has their finger on the power button.



Typical console system features



- Ever since the crash of '83
 - 1st parties control the distribution volume
 - 1st parties maintain rigid TRC requirements
 - 1st parties play “most favored nation” with developers
 - 1st parties control the shelf/marketing
 - Particularly via “house organ” style channels
 - 1st parties demand a cut of the revenue



Microsoft®
DirectX[®]10



amazon.com[®]



A brief short-term forecast



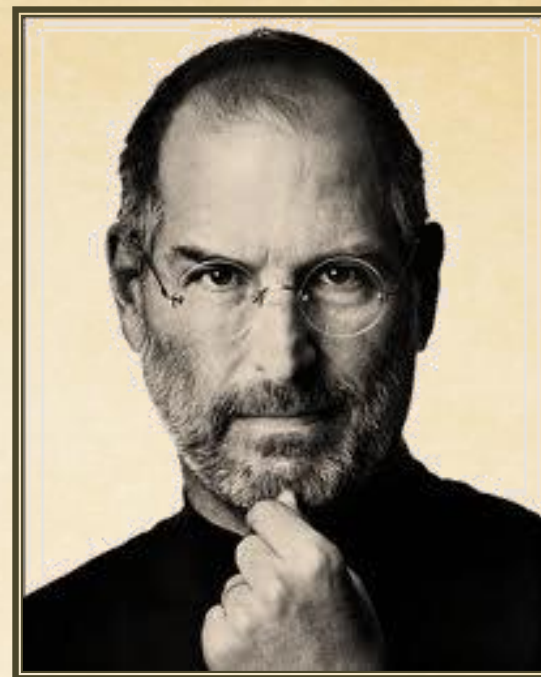
- Entry costs will continue to rise because
 - Platforms like **high quality**
 - Platforms derive **revenue** from those costs
- Dev costs will rise because
 - Greater **revenue comes from the passionate** aka hardcore
 - Who demand **greater sophistication/tech** over time
- The middle will hollow out
 - Big players will spend against these costs
 - Low end **just won't make money**
- Genrefication will ensue
 - To minimize **risk**
- Welcome back to **1997!** In fact, I do believe



A sad moment.

Then a tragic thing
happened.

One of the **mightiest** of
the wild world wizards
died.



He was someone born
with one foot over the
magic circle.





And so much of his early
work was about the power
of **play**.



He challenged
priesthoods and he
gave the power of
expressive play to
everyone.





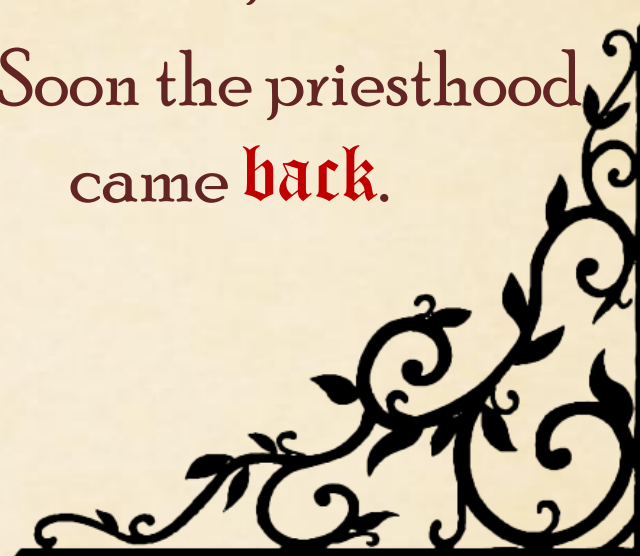
App Store Review Guidelines

Read the updated App Store Review Guidelines for iOS and Mac OS X apps.

[Learn more](#) ▶



People were
empowered... but as
his work
progressed, we
were paradoxically
disempowered too.
Soon the priesthood
came **back**.





We were both more, and
less, powerful.





What Design Is



- To a large degree, curbing people is implicit in what we call “design” – we **shape affordances**.
- Good affordances guide people towards acting in certain ways.
- Design is **mind control**.

Good design, and game design



- Game design is only **part** mind control, just like good art is only part mind control.
- It's about putting people into a **framework** and letting them find and discover and play and experiment and shape their reality.
- Then they leave the game – the art – and have these **new tools** to work with.

Bad designer, no cookie!



- Bad art, propaganda, and the like, is **full** mind control.
- It's where you are presented with an **illusion of choice**, but they all go to the same place.
- You leave with the mistaken impression that it is the right, **the only possible**, choice.



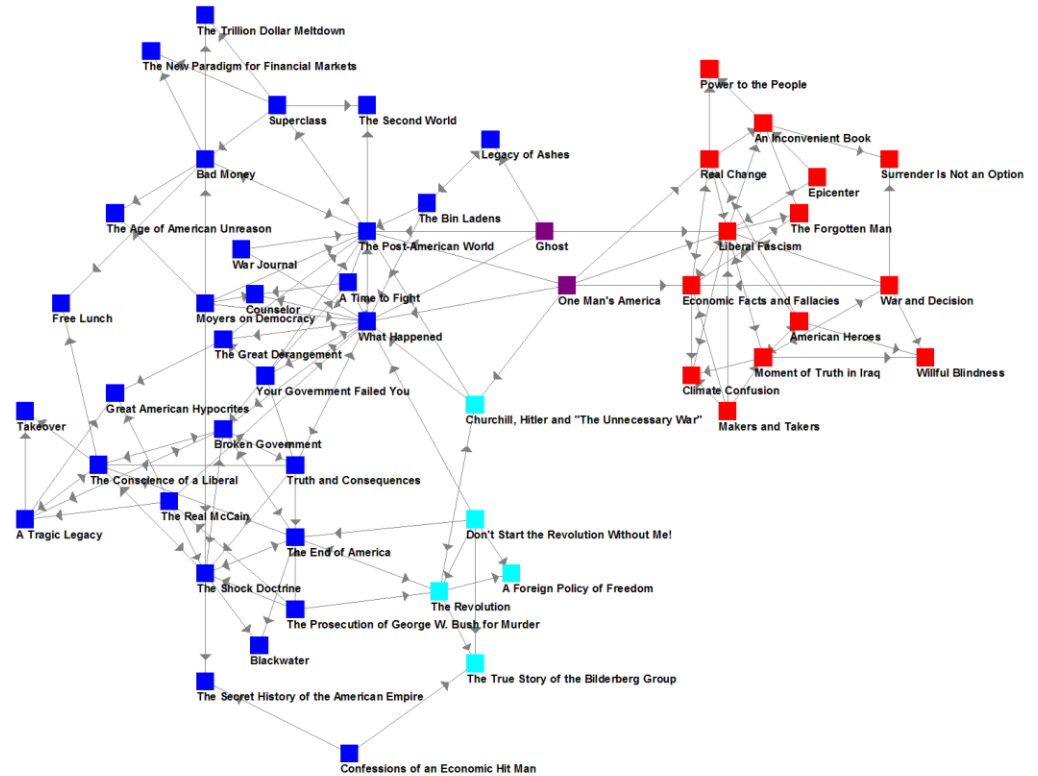
There is real power in quantified thought



But there are real risks too

From avatars to real people





GDC
Online

What used to be the virtual world...

- | | |
|---|--|
| <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formal group identity• Points and quantified identity• Publicly visible profiles• Formal roles• Malleability of environment• Strong ties• Placeness | <hr/> <p>©</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Facebook does it better✓ Facebook does it better✓ Facebook does it better✓ Facebook does it better✓ Facebook does it better✓ Tedious, cut. |
|---|--|

“Someday there won't *be* any admins. Someday it's gonna be your **bank records** and your **grocery shopping** and your **credit report** and yes, **your virtual homepage** with data that exists nowhere else. Someday it's gonna be *Snow Crash* and *Neuromancer* and *Otherland* all wrapped up into one, and it may be a little harder to write to Customer Service. Your avatar profile might be your credit record and **your resume** and **your academic transcript**, as well as your XP earned.



“On the day that happens, I bet we'll all wish we had a few more rights in the face of a very large, distributed server, anarchic, virtual world where it might be very very *hard* to move to a different service provider.



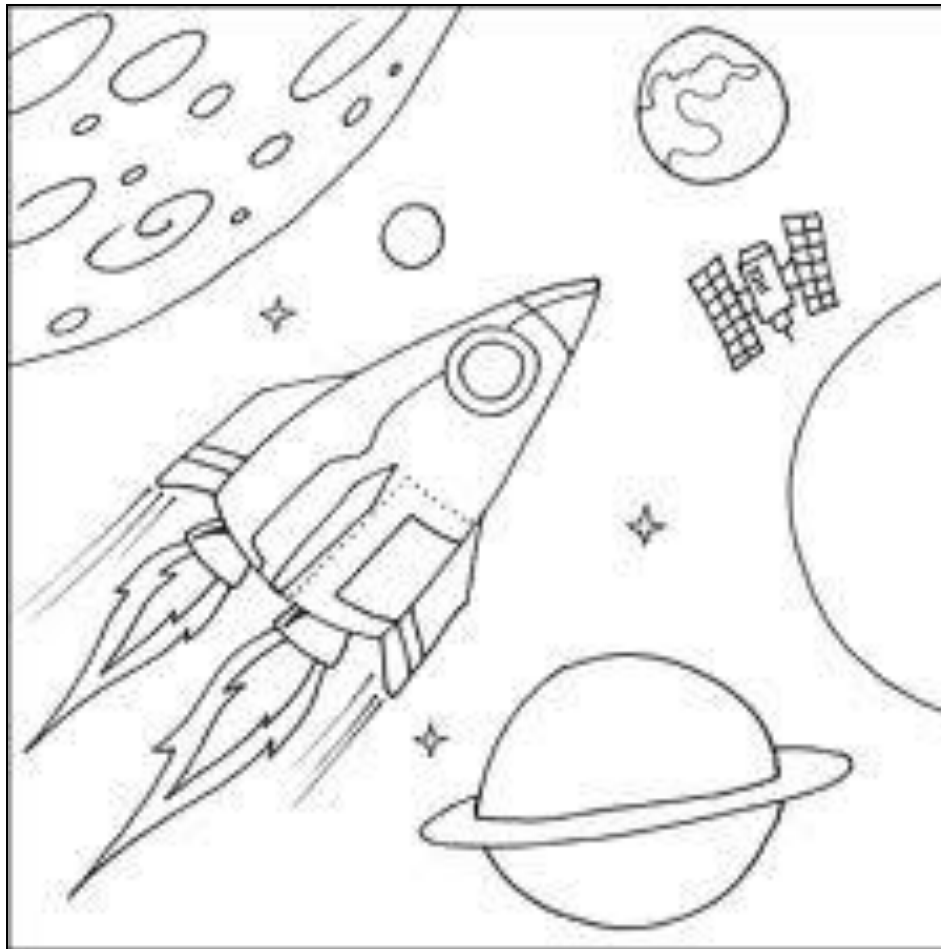
“So yeah. I'm not seriously proposing that we declare the rights of avatars. The doc is, as has been shown, riddled with gotchas and logical holes. It's a hypothetical exercise.



“For now.”



-Declaration of the Rights of Players, August 27th, 2000



Once upon a time...
In a galaxy far, far, away



THE WORLD VIRTUAL, or how we got our robot overlords.

I mean, protectors.



First, reputation

- An oversimplified **globalized single reputation value aggregator**, like Rotten Tomatoes.
- Followed by a rep farming or maintenance exploit firm designed to **falsify reputations**.
- Followed by another that was a trust verification or **exploit detection** firm.



Our new selves

- A classless system whereby world virtual userplayers could **acquire levels in a range of skills**.
- Levels in your top few classes were the single most prominently visible thing on your profiles on Facebook.
- A combination of these revolutionized the **hiring** industry *and* the **dating** industry.



LFG ASL STRDEXCON?

- This led to a **meatspace LFG system**.
 - Adding in a few extra things like detailed analysis of physical and mental stats gathered via quantified self logging; geolocation; social network analysis to determine degrees of proximity; and cluster analysis of consumption patterns, typical communications and status update semantic content, etc, allowed the algorithms to quickly build up userplayer compatibility data, with a genetic algorithm no less, which would allow these LFG groups to largely automate the process of building kickass teams or highly compatible marriages.



Powerlevel1!

- Needless to say, these led to **meatspace powerlevelling services**, ways of trading money for higher level rankings in skills.
- They were of dubious long-term value as they distorted the metrics around the LFG systems and undermined the core of the levelling system.



Social upheaval!

- Organizations sprang up to **wean people off of their addiction** to gaining more and more levels, or to **force them to take vacations** or learn to play the social game “the right way.”
- After all, **society needs good retention**, and reaching max level too quickly means you are more likely to opt out.



Society falling...

- We heard of **teams and marriages being broken up because one person outlevelled the others.**
- There was a booming business in **walkthroughs for industries**, though some businesses decried these as cheating.
- Smart ones instead supplied cheat codes for **career advancement.**



The workplace

- Jobs stratified, as in “**I work in a level 10-20 company**” (that says it fills a particular economic niche).
- Many of these exist just to do repetitive activities that really don’t add huge economic value to anyone, but do result in the **employees grinding up their skills**.



Economic collapse

- But the whole economy changed anyway, because ever since **that first dupe bug of world virtual credits**, the whole thing has been a little weird.
- Sure, all the world's currencies fell away in favor of a privately managed currency with perfect tracking where every single credit is tracked through the world economy perfectly, but **nobody foresaw the stacking bug**.
- Plus the fact that the holding company gave away state currency as an incentive to join the system means that now there's a rash of false userplayer profile creation in order to **farm the newbie bonus**.



I am multitudes

- Not that the need for alts is ignored. Subcultures emerge wherein **you can create a completely separate identity profile with its own alternate levels and identity**; these start out as competitors to the principal identity system, but quickly turn into leeches instead, leveraging false profiles on the main identity system.
- These are sometimes used just for entering specific subcultures (the closeted identity versus the public school board member identity) but eventually also get used for **muling, and thereby tax evasion**.



Cheaters!

- Which results in a whole new class of admins whose job it is to find instances of simultaneous play of alts, because **multiplaying the meatspace world is a huge source of bugs.**



It's all good...

- The whole system relies on a unique namespace for individual ID's.
- There was a moment of panic when the admins first realized that they were **running out of bits**, then another one when they implement ID reuse and get **clones**, then another one when people start getting free levels and rep and money because they find that id reuse did not adequately clean up all the **joined tables from the deceased**.



True permadeath

- Unfortunately, when a **hacker managed to get a bunch of celebrities and politicians banned from the identity system**, we discovered what happens when someone has their entire public identity erased.
- It wasn't be too hard for the President to reroll (except that he had to get a new Social Security number — the admins really don't do reimbs, sorry).



I'm not human, myself.

- Needless to say, the President was actually a corporation embodied by a synthetic idoru-style entity, because from very early on in the development of all this, it was pointed out that **legal entities can have reputations, levels, skills, compatibilities, personalities, and so on.**
- At the root level, there's no distinction between a meatspace userplayer made out of meat and **a meatspace userplayer who is actually fully virtual and using a meatspace identity as a sort of avatar into meatspace.**



I'm actually dish soap.

- In fact, there's a booming business in what we might term the child industry of brand management, which does nothing but **create and sell meatspace avatar identities for virtual beings** such as corporations, lobbying organizations, movies, and new brands of detergent, **enabling the detergent to pick up classes, levels, blood types, social security numbers, retirement accounts, a boyfriend, and a dog.**



Modern life is so hard...

- The detergent belongs to the household goods guild, needless to say, which has its own identity, which can be kind of confusing when the constituent members of the guild have personalities and voices and argue with the guild (not the guild leader, but the *guild*), and let's not even talk about how **we can't get the dishwasher serviced ever since it got kicked out of the guild and lost guild bank privileges.**

Whew.



- Fortunately, all this already happened.
- None of it is REALLY new.
 - Diploma mills?
 - Fake IDs?
 - Tax evasion?
 - Credit default swaps?
 - Brand management?
 - American Home Shield?
- We've been playing games with society for thousands of years!



Games **ARE** *social media.*



Once Upon A Time...

And so the wizards started to forge the magic circle anew. A **new kind** of magic circle.





“I hope, that in our archives and historical filings of the future, we do not allow the techie traditions of hierarchy and false regularity to be superimposed to the teeming, fantastic disorderliness of human life.”

– Ted Nelson

