

PLEASING THE TELLER

INDEPENDENT MMO GDC

19TH APRIL, 2009

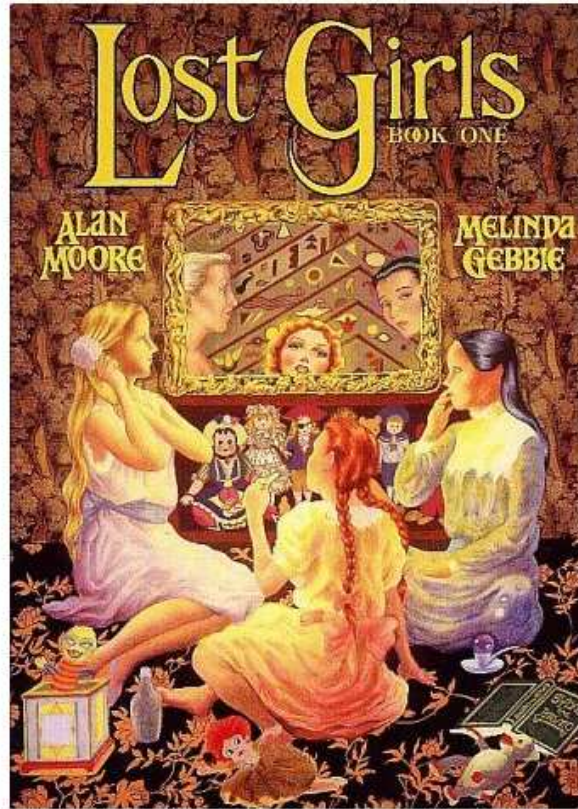
"WHAT KIND OF TIME IS 8:30 FOR A FINAL DAY KEYNOTE?!"

RICHARD A. **BARTLE**

INTRODUCTION

- THE TITLE OF THIS TALK COMES FROM A QUOTATION FROM THE 17TH CENTURY ENGLISH HISTORIAN **THOMAS FULLER**:
 - *The tale runs as it pleases the teller*
- NO, ME **NEITHER...**
- I **WAS** GOING TO CALL IT **LOST WORLDS**, BUT THAT SOUNDED **HISTORICAL** AND WE'VE ALREADY **HAD** A HISTORY KEYNOTE
- THOMAS FULLER **ALSO** SAID:
 - *Bad excuses are worse than none*

WORLDS, NOT GIRLS



- THIS TASTEFUL PORNOGRAPHIC WORK IS **ILLEGAL** IN SEVERAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES...

CONTENT

- SO, THE PROBLEM WITH TODAY'S MMOS IS THAT THEY'RE SO **EXPENSIVE** TO MAKE
- YOU NEED **HERDS** OF ARTISTS, PROGRAMMERS AND DESIGNERS
 - THIS IS NOT **ITSELF** THE PROBLEM
 - THE PROBLEM IS THAT THEY WANT TO BE **PAID**
- FORTUNATELY, COSTS **ARE** COMING DOWN, NOW THE **PIONEERS** HAVE FIGURED IT ALL OUT
- *A conservative believes nothing should be done for the first time*

FALLING COSTS

- PROGRAMMING IS GETTING LESS **EXPENSIVE** BECAUSE SOME CODE IS **RE-USABLE**
 - MIDDLEWARE!
- SOME ARTWORK IS **ALSO** RE-USABLE
 - MODELS! TEXTURES!
- IN **BOTH** CASES, THERE **IS** A PLACE FOR **OUTSOURCING**
 - AND THAT PLACE IS ASIA
- WHAT ABOUT **DESIGN**?

CONTENT CREATION

- **TOOLS** CAN HELP **SPEED UP** THE DESIGN PROCESS, BUT YOU **STILL** NEED DESIGNERS
- THIS IS AN AREA WHERE COSTS ARE **RIISING**
 - FEEL FREE TO BLAME **WOW**
- IF YOU REGARD PLAYERS AS **CONSUMERS**, WHAT THEY CONSUME IS **CONTENT**
- IT **USED** TO BE OK TO GENERATE CONTENT **PROCEDURALLY**
 - **CHINESE MENU** QUESTS
- **WOW** HAS 7,650 **HAND-CRAFTED** QUESTS!

COMPETING

- FOR **QUALITY**, HAND-CRAFTED QUESTS INVARIABLY **BEAT** PROCEDURALLY-GENERATED ONES
 - THERE **ARE** SOME **AI** TECHNIQUES THAT COULD **HELP**, BUT THEY'RE NOT UP TO HUMAN STANDARDS
- NARRATIVES ARE INDIVIDUALLY FORMED AS QUEST CHAINS THAT CAN **SAY** SOMETHING
 - DESIGNERS CAN PUT DIFFERENT **SPINS** ON **KILLING 10 RATS**
- IF YOU WANT TO COMPETE WITH *WOW*, **YOU** NEED TO HAVE CONTENT AS GOOD AS THIS

PROBLEMS

- HAND-CRAFTED QUESTS ARE EXPENSIVE BECAUSE:
- UNLIKE PROCEDURAL QUESTS, THEY CAN'T BE **MASS-PRODUCED**
- ONCE A PLAYER HAS DONE A PARTICULAR QUEST **ONCE**, IT'S DEAD
 - THEY'RE DAILY **QUESTS**, NOT DAILY **QUEST CHAINS...**
- QUESTS ARE NOT THE **ONLY** KIND OF CONTENT, THOUGH...
- *We have all forgot more than we remember*

TALKING OF LOST GIRLS...

- WHEN ALICE ARRIVED IN WONDERLAND, HER FIRST WORDS WERE: "CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER"

- (WHY DOES AMERICAN SPELLING KNOCK THE **U** OUT BEFORE **R** BUT NOT BEFORE **S**?)



USER-CREATED CONTENT

- A LOT HAS BEEN WRITTEN IN RECENT YEARS REGARDING **USER-CREATED** CONTENT
- SEE, CONTENT HAS BECOME **SO** EXPENSIVE THAT DEVELOPERS ARE **EVEN** PREPARED TO COUNTENANCE LETTING **PLAYERS** CREATE IT
 - *A fool's paradise is a wise man's hell*
- **PROFESSED** REASON:
 - WE ARE **EMPOWERING** OUR PLAYERS
- **ACTUAL** REASON:
 - THEY WILL MAKE STUFF FOR US FOR **FREE!**

FURTHERMORE

- CONTENT CREATED BY USERS IS UNPOLISHED, **GBARELD**, INCONSISTENT, CONTRADICTIONARY, DERIVATIVE, UNIMAGINATIVE, INCOMPATIBLE, ...
 - EXCEPT FOR THE <1% THAT ISN'T
- THE PLAYERS WHO **MAKE** IT LIKE IT, BUT FEW **OTHERS** DO
- THEY'RE NOT **DESIGNERS**
 - *If an ass goes travelling he will not come back a horse*
- WELL ... **THAT** KIND OF UCC IS LIKE THAT...

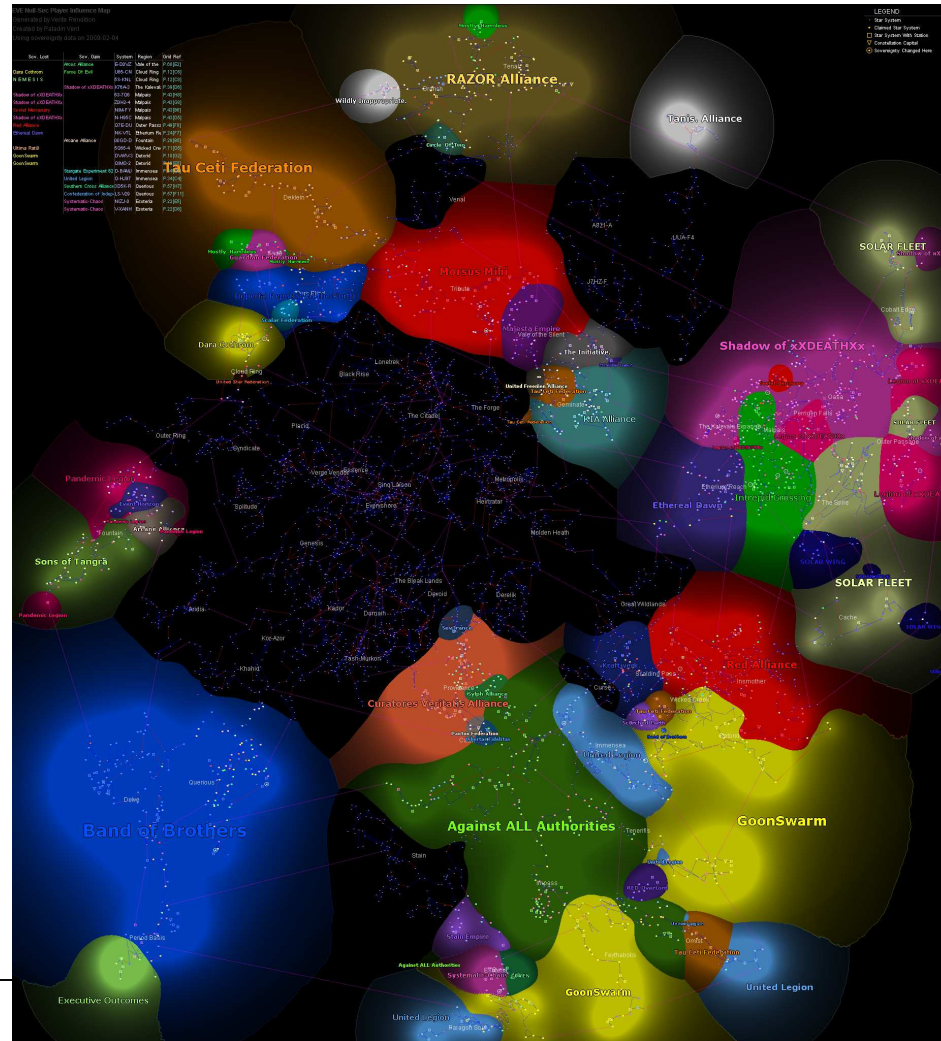
WHEREAS DOROTHY

- WHEREAS DOROTHY, UPON ARRIVAL IN OZ, SAID: "WE WILL GO TO THE EMERALD CITY AND ASK THE GREAT OZ HOW TO GET BACK TO KANSAS AGAIN"



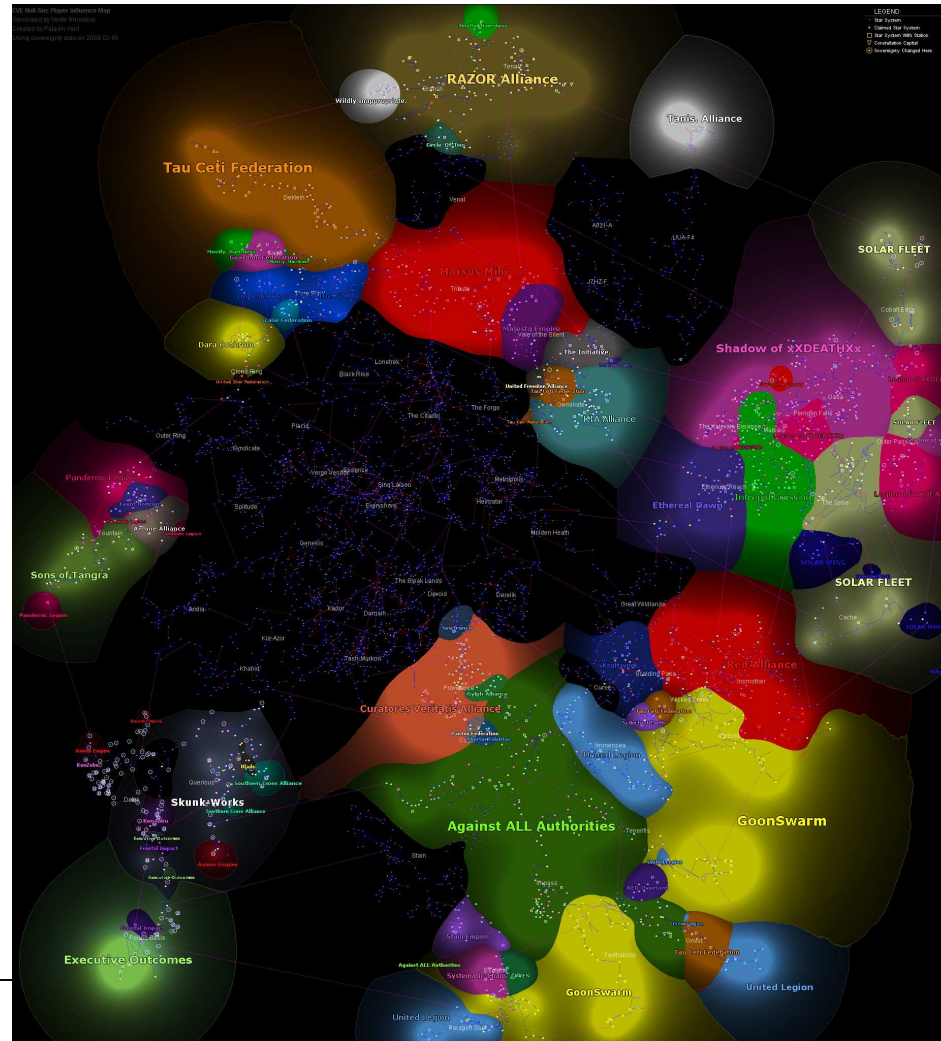
EVE ONLINE

- 4TH FEBRUARY, 2009:



EVE ONLINE

- 5TH FEBRUARY, 2009:



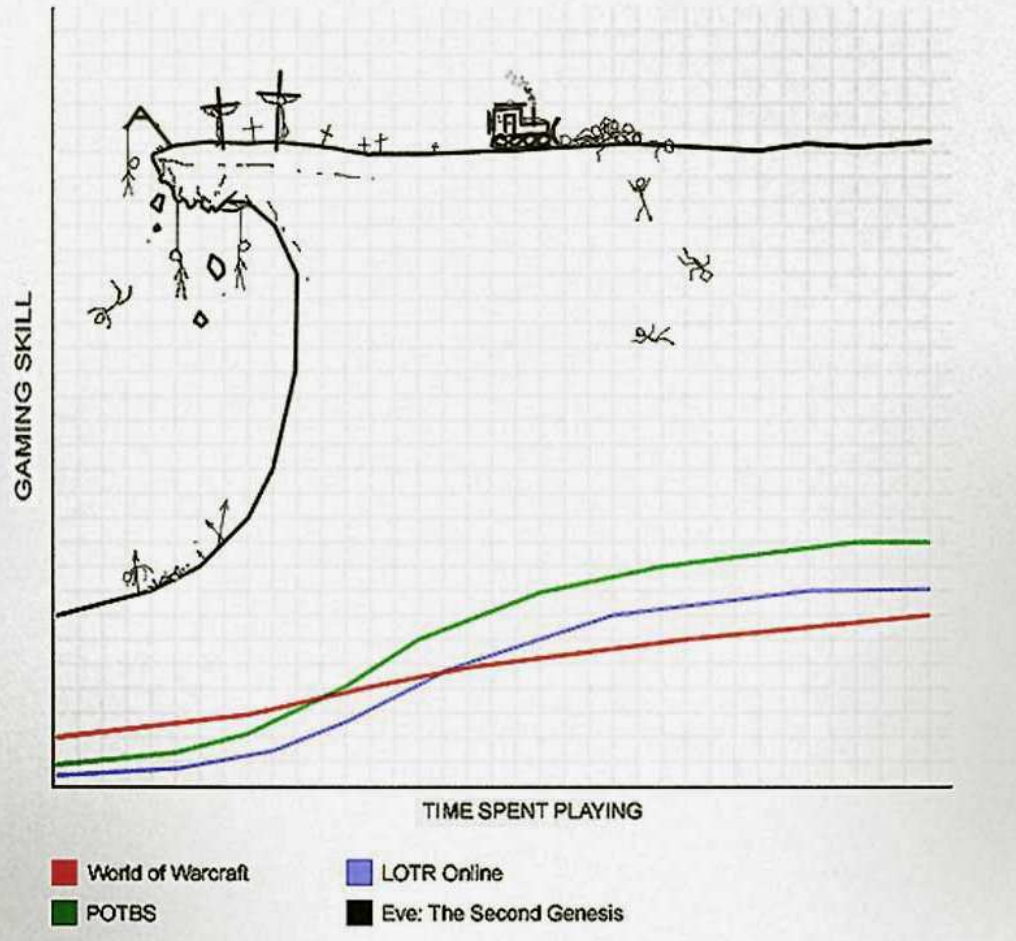
UCC ≠ UCC

- ALTHOUGH “USER-**CREATED** CONTENT” AND “USER-**GENERATED** CONTENT” ARE OFTEN USED INTERCHANGEABLY, THERE **IS** A DIFFERENCE
 - USER-**CREATED** CONTENT IS CREATED **EXPLICITLY** BY THE ACTIONS OF PLAYERS
 - USER-**GENERATED** CONTENT IS CONTENT CREATED **IMPLICITLY** BY THE ACTIONS OF PLAYERS
- USER-GENERATED CONTENT IS **EMERGENT**
- *EVE'S* ENVIRONMENT IS SO **RICH** THAT INTERESTING THINGS JUST **HAPPEN**

UNFORTUNATELY...

- YOU **PAY** FOR A RICHLY INTERACTIVE WORLD:

LEARNING CURVES OF POPULAR MMORPGS



EXPERIENCE

- THE MORE **COMPLICATED** THE WORLD, THE **HARSHER** THE NEWBIE EXPERIENCE
 - *All things are difficult before they are easy*
- MMOS BUILT AROUND **NON-EMERGENT** CONTENT HAVE THE **OPPOSITE** PROBLEM
 - GREAT FOR **NEWBIES**, LACKING FOR **OLDBIES**
- THEY CURRENTLY USE A **TWO-GAME** SYSTEM
 - THE **LEVELLING** GAME
 - THE **RAIDING** GAME
 - OPTIONALLY WITH THE **PVP/RVR** GAME
- BUT THIS ONLY **DELAYS** THE **INEVITABLE**

AS FOR WENDY...

- "I WISH I HAD A PRETTY HOUSE,
THE LITTLEST EVER SEEN,
WITH FUNNY LITTLE RED WALLS
AND ROOF OF MOSSY GREEN"
- WENDY **MADE UP**
NEVERLAND **HERSELF**,
SO CAN'T **EVER** BELIEVE
IT'S MORE THAN JUST A
FANTASY
– HERS...



Peter Pan

*High in the tree tops of the
Never-Never-Never Land*

THE ELDER GAME

- WHY DO WE NEED TWO GAMES?
- IF THE RAIDING GAME IS SO **GOOD**, WHY EVEN **BOTHER** WITH THE LEVELLING GAME?
 - YOU COULD MAKE THE RAIDING GAME BE **THE** GAME
- WELL, THE RAIDING GAME **ISN'T** THAT GOOD...
- LIKE **QUESTS**, RAIDING CONTENT IS **FIXED**
 - THERE'S ONLY SO MANY TIMES YOU CAN RUN NAXX BEFORE IT'S **SAMEY**
 - **ONCE**, IN FACT
- *A tale twice told is a cabbage twice sold*

OTHER ELDER GAMES

- OTHER ATTEMPTS AT THE ELDER GAME ALSO FLOP
- RVR IS NEVER RESOLVED
 - AND THEREFORE **POINTLESS**
- PVP **IS** BETTER - **IF** YOU'RE GOOD AT PVP
 - BUT THE RESULTS ARE **ALSO** POINTLESS
- THEY PROVIDE **BURST** FUN, BUT NO **FUN OVER TIME**
- THIS DEAD-ENDEDNESS IS DUE TO THE NARRATIVE **PHILOSOPHY** OF THESE MMOS

STORY

- THERE ARE **THREE** KINDS OF STORY IN MMOS
 - INDEED, IN **ALL** GAMES
- **BACKSTORY** DESCRIBES WHAT HAPPENED **BEFORE** THE MMO WENT LIVE
 - HOW THE ELVES CAME TO MIDDLE EARTH
- **NARRATIVE** IS WHAT THE DESIGNERS **ARRANGE** TO HAPPEN
 - QUESTS TO HELP THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING
- **HISTORY** IS WHAT **ACTUALLY** HAPPENED
 - COOL! I FELL OFF WEATHERTOP!

HISTORY

- OF THESE, **HISTORY** IS THE MOST IMPORTANT
- HISTORY IS THE PLAYER'S **RETELLING** OF INTERESTING **EVENTS**
- THIS MEANS THERE MUST HAVE **BEEN** SOME INTERESTING EVENTS
- **NO** HISTORY MEANS NOTHING **INTERESTING** HAPPENED
 - WHERE'S THE **FUN** IN THAT?
- PROBLEM: "INTERESTING" **CHANGES** OVER TIME

ANALOGY

- WHEN YOU START OFF IN A NEW MMO IT'S LIKE ARRIVING IN A FOREIGN **RAILWAY STATION** ON A **BACKPACKING** TRIP
- WITH CLASSES AND RACES, THE DESIGNERS HAVE PROVIDED **TRAINS** THAT ARE GUARANTEED TO GO TO **INTERESTING** PLACES
 - YOU WANT TO SHOOT **FIREBALLS**? BOARD THE **MAGE** TRAIN!
- QUESTS ARE THE **ENGINES** THAT PULL THE CARRIAGES ALONG

RAILS

- HOWEVER, TRAINS RUN ON **RAILS**
- IF YOU WANT TO DISEMBARK AND GO **ELSEWHERE**, WELL, YOU **CAN'T!**
- THE DESIGN PHILOSOPHY IS ALL ABOUT **CONTROLLING** THE PLAYER EXPERIENCE
- THE **SAME** PHILOSOPHY IS APPLIED FOR NEWBIES AND OLDBIES ALIKE
- **IT'S** CONSISTENT – BUT PLAYERS **AREN'T!**
 - *Travel makes a wise man better and a fool worse*

CONVERSELY

- *EVE* IS ALL ABOUT **FREEING** THE PLAYERS TO FIND THEIR **OWN** FUN
- THIS ALLOWS FOR A MUCH MORE **NUANCED**, FINE-GRAINED EXPERIENCE
- YOU CAN FIND **EXACTLY** WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU, INSTEAD OF A MERE **APPROXIMATION**
- **EVENTUALLY...**
- AGAIN, THIS IS BECAUSE OF *EVE*'S "OPEN-ENDED" PHILOSOPHY
- PLAYERS **DO** WANT AN OPEN-ENDED MMO, BUT **NOT** ONE THAT IS OPEN AT **BOTH ENDS**

MUD HISTORY

- FOR THE FIRST **10** YEARS OF THEIR EXISTENCE, MUDS WERE ALL ABOUT **FREEDOM**
 - **NO** CLASSES, **NO** RACES, **NO** FORMAL QUESTS
- THERE WAS A **BALANCE** BETWEEN SOCIALISERS AND ACHIEVERS
- IN 1989, *TINYMUD* APPEARED
 - SOCIALISERS **LEFT** FOR MOOS, MUCKS, MUSHES
- WITH THE SOCIALISER **BRAKES** OFF, ACHIEVERS WENT ALL OUT FOR HARD-CORE **GAMING** FUN
 - THUS, THE *DIKUMUD* PARADIGM

PHILOSOPHY

- **GAME** WORLDS AND **SOCIAL** WORLDS WERE EACH DEFINED BY **NOT** BEING THE OTHER
- THIS **LOCKED IN** THEIR PHILOSOPHIES OF "GAME" AND "NOT A GAME"
- THEY WERE **ALSO** DEFINED BY NOT BEING WHAT WENT **BEFORE** THEM
- IN BALANCED WORLDS, THE WORLD WAS **CONSTRAINED** BUT THE PLAYERS **FREE**
 - IN SOCIAL WORLDS, THE WORLD IS **ALSO** FREE
 - IN GAME WORLDS, THE **PLAYERS** ARE ALSO **CONSTRAINED**

TODAY

- WE'RE LIVING WITH THE **LEGACY** OF THIS EVEN **TODAY**
- DESIGNERS IN THE *DIKUMUD* PARADIGM ARE **STILL** TRYING NOT TO MAKE SOCIAL OR BALANCED WORLDS
 - FROM SOME SUBCONSCIOUS, COLLECTIVE MEMORY...
- LIKEWISE THE FEW **BALANCED** COMMERCIAL MMOS OUT THERE ARE TRYING NOT TO **SPLIT**
 - BAND OF BROTHERS – GAME
 - GOONSWARM – (ANTI)SOCIAL

THE SOLUTION

- THE SOLUTION IS FAIRLY **OBVIOUS** HERE
- ANY SUGGESTIONS?
- *'Tis not every question that deserves an answer*
- CORRECT: WE LET **ALICE** AND **DOROTHY** PLAY **TOGETHER**

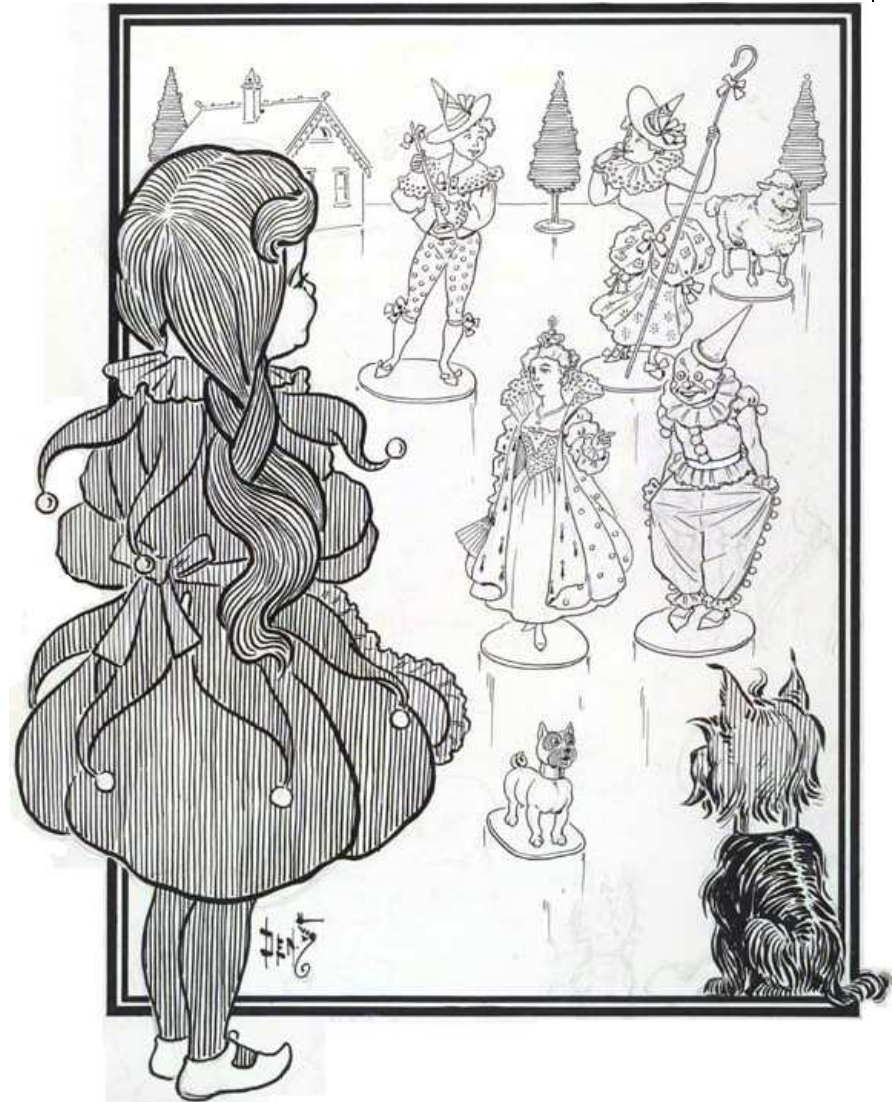
ALICE

- ALICE FINDS MERELY **BEING** IN ANOTHER WORLD INTERESTING
- SHE'LL GO WHEREVER **FORTUNE AND FANCY** MAY TAKE HER
- SHE REPRESENTS THE OLD, **BALANCED** WORLDS LIKE *MUDI*



DOROTHY

- DOROTHY IS **WARY** OF THE NEW WORLD SHE HAS ARRIVED IN
- SHE WANTS A **PATH** SHE CAN FOLLOW TO GET **THROUGH** IT
- SHE REPRESENTS THE MODERN, **GAME** WORLDS LIKE *WOW*



WENDY

- WENDY WANTS TO LIVE IN THE WORLD THAT **SHE** CREATED
- IT'S HER OWN, **PERSONAL** FANTASY
- WENDY REPRESENTS THE MODERN, **SOCIAL** WORLDS LIKE SL



PLAYING TOGETHER

- ALICE WORLDS ARE NEWBIE-**UNFRIENDLY** BUT PROVIDE THE DEPTH AND FREEDOM THAT OLDBIES **CRAVE**
- DOROTHY WORLDS ARE VERY NEWBIE-**FRIENDLY** BUT OLDBIES, WHO DON'T WANT THEIR HANDS HELD, FEEL **DISENCHANTED**
- SO: START OFF AS A **DOROTHY** WORLD AND SWITCH TO **ALICE** FOR THE ELDER GAME
- THESE 20-YEAR-OLD PHILOSOPHICAL DIFFERENCES **NO LONGER NEED TO PERSIST**

HOW IT WOULD WORK

- YOU START OFF BY SELECTING A CHARACTER PACK **OPTIMISED** FOR ONE STYLE OF PLAY
 - YOU CAN **DIVERGE** FROM IT ANY TIME YOU LIKE
- THE FIRST QUESTS ARE **HAND-CRAFTED**, BUT LATER ON THEY **EMERGE** FROM PLAYER INTERACTIONS
 - LIKE PUTTING **WANT** ADS ON AN AUCTION HOUSE, BUT POTENTIALLY **MUCH** MORE COMPLEX
- EVENTUALLY YOU SEGUE INTO A FREEFORM GAME
 - *A man among children will be long a child, a child among men will be soon a man*

AS FOR WENDY?

- ALICE AND DOROTHY ARE BOTH IN WORLDS **NOT** OF THEIR **OWN** MAKING
- THEY ALLOW A "GAME CONCEIT"
 - A **MAGIC CIRCLE**
- WENDY CAN BUILD ALICE AND DOROTHY WENDY HOUSES TO PLAY **IN**, BUT SHE CAN'T PLAY **WITH** THEM
- THAT DOESN'T MEAN THEY HAVE TO BE **ENEMIES**, THOUGH...
 - *There is a scarcity of friendship, but not of friends*

CONCLUSION

- TODAY'S VIRTUAL WORLDS ARE VICTIMS OF THEIR OWN **ORTHODOXIES**
- THEY OPERATE WITHIN **ARTIFICIAL** BOUNDARIES FOR OBSCURE **HISTORICAL** REASONS
- PLAYERS AND DESIGNERS SENSE THERE'S SOMETHING **WRONG**, BUT NOT QUITE WHAT
- FORTUNATELY, BY UNDERSTANDING THE **CAUSE**, THE **EFFECT** IS EASILY REMOVED

ONE LAST THING

- HOW THINGS **WERE** DOESN'T MEAN THAT'S HOW THINGS **SHOULD** BE
- HISTORY SHOULD **INFORM** THE PRESENT, NOT **DICTATE** IT
- TIMES **CHANGE**:
- *A woman, a dog and a walnut tree, the more you beat them, the better they be*
- GO OUT THERE AND MAKE SOMETHING **NEW!**