# *Biting the Hand*:
## A Compilation of the Columns to Date

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## Table of Contents

# 1  Year 2001 Columns

## *1.1*  Broadband is not your savior
### *Volume ten, issue 1*
### *January 4, 2001*

I don't know how many times in the past three months I've heard some variation of the following:
"Yes, well, we're concentrating on broadband delivery for our online games; with all that
bandwidth, that's where the real action will be."

In a word: wrong. (Now you see why I haven't been named Diplomat of the Year by the GDC or
AIAS.)

I don't know why I find it surprising that game company executives don't understand the online
world or that they have an ugly misconception or two about it; when I do side work as a
consultant for companies, I spend a lot of my time trying to fix these mistaken impressions at the
top level. The misconceptions about broadband beget silly statements, such as the one above, and
belie a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the internet, bandwidth, and game design.

Unfortunately, these misconceptions are growing to epidemic proportions in the minds of publishers and developers, and it's only going to cause some red faces down the line. Here are the three major boo-boos I most often hear:

**Misconception #1:** Broadband speeds will let us send more data faster, and this will be good for everyone.

Unfortunately, more data transmitted also equals more lag on the internet. To use a fractured and somewhat overworked analogy, the pipes that carry data are like a superhighway, and each data packet to and from both servers and users is a car on that highway. The more cars on the highway, the slower traffic moves. The end result is a traffic jam.

And, as with a highway, even if more lanes (fiber cables) are added, they fill up quickly, especially in large urban areas. Data packets traveling across the country must slow down to go through these choke points. As traffic grows, so does the number of choke points. We can't seem to build enough lanes to handle the traffic growth.

In other words, the more data each individual can send and receive, the worse our slow-traffic problem becomes. Already, we're only laying about 1/8 of the fiber needed to handle today's growth of data transmission, when 90 percent plus of U.S. home internet users are stuck at 56k; what happens when 50 percent or more have broadband connections? At some point, we are going to experience nationwide and worldwide traffic jams on a daily basis.

**Misconception #2:** Our customers want the so-called rich media allowed by broadband speeds. This will let us stream huge media movies, 3D graphics, and sound files that will wow the unwashed masses.

Wonderful. Not only will we clog the lines by having more people downloading and uploading more data packets, we're going to exacerbate the problem by increasing the size of files and streamed data loads. This is rather like an amusement park operator noticing that the park is sold out and filled to capacity, and instead of closing the doors to those waiting in line, he cuts ticket prices in half.

In actuality, what is more likely to happen is widespread dissatisfaction with such media as the internet begins to grind to a stop with all that downloading going on.

**Misconception #3:** If you think broadband is fast now, just wait ten years!

This is the worst broadband misconception of all. What is called broadband speed today is not likely to be the broadband speed of tomorrow.

When considering broadband data-transmission rates, most people seem to have bought into past marketing efforts of the telephone companies and cable providers, namely that DSL or cable modem access will allow you to download 50MB movies and the like in mere seconds.
While this is theoretically possible, it is not what usually happens (see misconception #1, above). Such claims are based on a best-case scenario in which everything from the destination server to

the home computer, including the distributed nature of the internet, works to 100-percent perfection. Oh, yeah, right. That happens all the time when I access the internet! I never run into a broken or badly programmed router or hop through a host site with bad lag due to insufficient bandwidth or get ground to a halt by a downed server.

That claim was also most often used before cable providers started putting bandwidth governors on subscribers and before DSL traffic started overloading central trunk lines. I find it absolutely amazing that there are still less than 4 million cable broadband subscribers in the U.S., but they eat so much bandwidth that governors must be used to slow them down. Instead of the rapid-fire data transmission promised, cable subscribers in several markets are now limited to transmission rates lower than 400kbps on downloads, and in some cases, 128kbps on uploads. In other words, nothing close to the transmission speeds required for downloading a 50MB file in seconds. What kind of punky cable internet transmission rates will we see in ten years, when we have 40, 50, or 60 million cable modem subscribers? We may end up longing for the days of the 56k modem.

As for DSL, sure, you can hit those transmission rates...if you're willing to pay $200 plus per month for the bandwidth. The most common DSL subscription is far lower (at around $40 a month for that same 128k upload), and lower than the 400kbps download option that cable providers have mandated for their $40-a-month subscribers in high-use areas. And even with only about a million DSL subscribers nationwide, local trunks are being overwhelmed with transmitted data, causing problems for data and voice calls alike.

You ought to see the long faces in boardrooms when I deflate these misconceptions; broadband is the current Holy Grail, and nobody likes having their myths shattered. What I try to emphasize to decision makers are these points:

Broadband is not some miracle technology that will soon free you from retailers and distributors. Yes, some day we will have enough bandwidth available to allow easy transmission of entire CD-ROM games, but you and I will have retired long before that day arrives. For the next five years, concentrate on CD delivery of engines, with graphic and code updates via the internet. You do not exist in a vacuum. By the very nature of the internet, you are dependent on every other server, router, and bandwidth connection thereof. Some will be better than your setup, some will be worse. There will be more and more traffic jams. You can't control that, and neither can broadband access, which is actually going to make things worse in the short term. If you think that waiting for ubiquitous broadband access is the answer to your problems, you are fooling yourself and endangering your company.

It is far more important to design games and websites that decrease the amount of data transmitted, not increase it. This simplifies the process all around, and reduces the chances of server-based lag, and you will achieve better customer satisfaction and word of mouth because of it.

Being the eternal optimist, I have no doubt I am a voice in the wilderness again.

**Two corrections from last week:** In last week's column, the 2001 Hot List, there were two factual mistakes:

*Ultima Worlds Online: Ultima* is not *UO: Third Dawn*. *UO: Third Dawn* is to be a major upgrade to *Ultima Online*, and UWO:O is an entirely new game.

The Sony Online Entertainment MMOG in development, *Star Wars*, does have a website at http://www.station.sony.com/starwars/.

No excuses: I screwed up here. How did this happen, you ask? Simple: in preparation for a vacation during the holiday season, I wrote and submitted the column in November, several weeks before the column's scheduled publication date. At that time, the *Star Wars* website hadn't been launched, and it wasn't clear whether *Third Dawn* was going to be used for UO or UWO:O. (Well, it wasn't clear to me; others didn't have the same problem.)

The lesson here is not to write a column too early in a medium where information changes quickly, and then blow off on vacation. Talk about getting bit!

**1.2** *Nothing new under the sun*
  ***Volume ten, issue two***
  ***January 11, 2001***

I keep harking back to this one point: when it comes to massively multiplayer games, there is nothing new under the sun.

Take real-world suicide for online reasons, for example. A couple months ago, there was a big hoorah over the supposed suicide of an *EverQuest* guide who was removed from her post. While the fans rushed to start elevating poor, disturbed Sheyla to sainthood, news organs and some fan sites noted (for once) that the "suicide" was unconfirmed, and not to jump to conclusions. Of course, the suicide turned out to be an elaborate hoax, as did the whole "reality" surrounding the supposed real-world life of the players involved.  The 19-year-old Sheyla turned out to be a young man who, apparently, was attempting to embarrass his young wife, who had recently split from him.

And none of this surprised me at all. I knew when the suicide story first broke on the fan sites that there was a 99.99 percent chance it was a hoax.

I can hear someone in the back of the room now: "Oh, yeah, sure! Jessica has 20/20 hindsight, just like the rest of us." Not so, not so, to my everlasting headache. How did I know this was almost certainly a hoax? Easy: in my career over the past 15 years in this industry, I've seen the "untimely death scenario" played out many times, in many online games and online services, with many clever variations. In each case I have been attendant to since 1986, with only one exception*, the whole purpose of the exercise was basic and simple: to focus the attention of the online community on the perpetrator. For some, it is just simply part of the game within the game. The Sheyla case is a particularly pernicious form in that the most common pattern of "announce and be talked out of it" was not followed. Still, I've seen this one a few times over the years, too, so I wasn't particularly surprised at the outcome.

Why do people do this online? Sometimes it is for the attention, such as the occasional disturbed player who announces to all and sundry that he or she is about to commit suicide and has come to bid all a farewell. I call this the "good-bye, cruel world!" scenario. Using it has the effect of causing other players spending hours talking down the perp from his intention. Over the few days afterward, the now-redeemed player is showered with attention from a widening base of other players, compassionate people seeking to show this poor, unloved schmuck that he is, indeed, a loved schmuck.

Never mind that most of them not only don't know the person in real life; a good percentage never even knew the player's character. The perpetrators of "good-bye, cruel world!" understand that most people are good-hearted and open-armed, and use that fact to elicit a little online love. Most of the perpetrators probably are disturbed and lonely, just not enough to do something so drastic as take their own lives. What I find so despicable about this scenario is that it is almost impossible to determine in a chat room or MMOG if someone really means to do it. I mean, you can't read their body language or listen to their tone of voice; you have to take the perp at his or her word. I have no doubt there is the rare case when someone is actually looking for a good reason not to kill him or herself; the point is, you'll never know if its real or just some jerk pulling your chain, will you?

Other times, players have a sneakier motive for pulling such a hoax, as was apparently the case in the Sheyla incident. I call this the "ignore the man behind the curtain!" ploy. While the perpetrator is waving a red flag in front of the eyes of the community, something sneaky is going on behind the scenes. Sometimes it's for monetary gain ("We've set up a suicide-prevention memorial fund in Departed Player's name; please contribute and help wipe out suicide in our lifetimes!"), sometimes it is an attempt to cause other players to feel the wrath of the community ("Departed Player wouldn't have done this if XYZ Guild weren't such heartless brutes. Shun them! No, *kill* them!").

Sometimes, it is just that the perp has been telling so many divergent lies about the "real life" of the now-dead "person," it is impossible to keep all the lies straight. The only way to get out of it and still remain a part of the community is to wax the character and start over with a clean slate as a new character. And there is no reason not to go out in a blaze of glory, right? If you watch closely what other players relate about the dead player in the days following the "event," you can usually tell who the perp is. He or she is the one who starts off a discussion with something to the effect of "I sure miss Departed Player; he was a such a great person!" Then he or she sits back and loudly agrees as everyone extols all the wonderful virtues of the dearly departed.

These cynical observations aside, this is a phenomenon that has been with us since Day One of online gaming, and probably won't go away. As long as there is easy anonymity available over the wires, we'll be seeing online suicides occasionally played out in the press and on fan sites. And since most of us have reservations about removing anonymity from the online world, the cycle will continue.

Ironically, it is just something we're going to have to live with.

*Earlier, I mentioned there was one case I knew of in the last 15 years that wasn't a hoax. I can't really pin it as an online suicide, because it happened on the telephone, not online.
In 1993, while I was working at a small online service start-up in Texas, a young woman called customer service one day to complain that her account had been turned off. We had recently gone from flat rates to hourly charges, and she had racked up hundreds of dollars in charges in a MMOG she had been playing for a while. When we attempted to bill her, her credit card was refused, so the system automatically closed her down.

As the young customer-service rep tried to explain this to the woman, she became more and more shrill, screaming at the rep that she had to get online, she had to be with her friends, they needed her. Then, suddenly, she stopped screaming and calmly told the rep not to worry about it. After a short pause, the rep heard a loud report, then a clunk as the phone fell to the floor. When the police arrived at her house, they found she had indeed blown her head off while clutching the phone.

As tragic as this was--and you can only imagine how the customer-service rep felt; hell, it chills my blood to this day to recall the anguished pallor of that person's face--as tragic as the whole mess was, note this about the incident:

The woman never threatened suicide to the rep, never gave the rep time to realize that the situation had changed or an opportunity to talk her out of it. She made sure someone would know what she had done and just plain did it. No matter how many veiled cries for help in the days previous, this is how it happens when pain exceeds the resources for coping with that pain, and this is how most true suicides go about it; make certain someone will know, then go and do the deed.

And that's why I was morally certain from the start that the Sheyla suicide was a hoax. "She" made no provisions that anyone online would know that she was gone. For someone so tied to and dependent on the *EverQuest* community, this was a virtual impossibility (pun unintentional).


## 1.3   It s Like Instant Karma, But With A Time Delay

Volume 10, Issue 3
January 18, 2001

Here we go again.  Some things never change.

We take you now to Yester-Year **(NOTE to Eds: please keep these caps and hyphenation),** when personal computers were the stuff of science fiction and gamers were forced to play RPGs with the primitive tools of pencil, graph paper and human gray matter.  Yes, all the way back to the 1980s, the Stone Age of role-playing games, when men were Warriors, women were Clerics and no one thought that was a particularly sexist arrangement.

What was the biggest problem players faced then?  Was it the difficult job of finding a good group of people to game with?  Was it understanding the complicated and ever-changing rules to *Dungeons and Dragons* or *Gamma World* or *Paranoia* well enough to play effectively?  Was it

finding enough time to actually do some serious gaming and still perform such mundane functions as working, eating and sleeping?

No, my friends, it was none of those things. The greatest danger was a hideous one, indeed, one to make even the staunchest Barbarian pale in fear. Of what do I speak? Observe, gentle reader:

**Bud the Warrior:** Uh, yeah, OK, I say we should go down the tunnel to the right. Gang?

**Slimly the Thief:** Yeah, sure, looks good. My infravision doesn t see anything nasty waiting for us.

**Shannala the Cleric:** Verily, then, it is a good choice.

**Bondago the Magic User:** Let s do it. Ready Magic Missile spell!

**Bud the Warrior:** Uh, yeah, OK, we take the tunnel to the right and carefully walk twenty feet down it.

**Morono the DungeonMaster:** Large, nasty arrows fly at you from all directions from hidden and undetectable traps in the walls, floor and ceiling, piercing every part of your bodies and killing everyone in the party instantly. You re all DEAD! Hahahahahahahahahhaaaaaaa!

Sound familiar? I m sure it does, because the greatest danger for gamers in that technologically-challenged era and yea! verily, even unto today, was getting stuck with a DM who mistook the  You Will All Die Horribly In My Impossible Mission  Again  Syndrome for actual talent, such as  Good Scenario Design.   And it seemed to happen just about every damned time, didn t it? I swear, 9 out of 10 DMs in the live RPG games I played in just plain sucked rocks. I m sure you have similar horror stories.

You might ask,  Jessica! Why this little time trip just to note the inability of 9 out of 10 DMs, than and now, to construct and manage a balanced, interesting quest? We *know* all that.   To which I reply with just two words:

*Neverwinter Nights*.

Yes, I m throwing a bucket of cold water on the concept of the absolute coolness of player-generated content for online games. The debate on this subject has been an off-and-on thing since at least 1989, when proponents for both sides argued it vociferously on various Game Roundtables on the old GEnie online service. The issue has recently gained new life with the anticipation of **Bioware s** *NeverWinter Nights* ([http://www.bioware.com/nwn/NWN_faq.html](http://www.bioware.com/nwn/NWN_faq.html)), or *NwN* in GamerSpeak (Eds: keep caps, please), which will allow a player to set up a free server, design game sessions like Dungeon Masters of old and offer multiplayer sessions for a small group of people. Bioware is aiming to allow anyone to run a server on their home PC to allow from eight to as many 64 people on a player-run server, though you ll need the bandwidth of a cable or DSL modem connection for that last number.

Naturally, some players are licking their chops and rubbing their hands just thinking of that kind of control:   Design a quest and guide people through it?  Be my very own Dungeon Master?  Hoo, boy; I can hardly wait!   The discussions on various fan forum message boards are all about how *NwN* will transform online gaming and put companies such as Sony Online and EA.com out of business quicker  n you can say  Hidden traps kill all!

D j  vu.  Remember when free gaming online with Retail Hybrids such as *Quake* and *Unreal* was going to kill MMOGs?  The players and the press were full of those pronouncements.  That was three years ago and MMOGs have six times as many paying subscribers today as they did then.  The reason?  Simple: Persistent Worlds appeal to a different sort of gamer than do Retail Hybrids.  The doom-sayers confused technology and playing style with the actual market realities.

And so it is with the pronouncements about *NwN*.  Just what makes anyone think that having some new-fangled technology available will suddenly transform crappy DMs into good ones?  This is confusing the tools with the creative process.  New tools might make it easier to construct an interesting scenario, but they confer no sudden ability for creativity, subtlety or genius.  At the risk of offending thousands of players who also consider themselves good DMs, I ve said it before and I say it again:

Sturgeon s Law, that 90% of everything is crap, applies to DMs as much as anyone or anything else.  There is a reason that so many entertainment projects fail; creative talent is limited.  If such genius were so readily available, every entertainment project would be a major.  Do you see that happening in any entertainment field?

What does this mean, then?  It means that instant karma is about to happen again.  *NwN* will hit the shelves, many will buy it and run their own free servers with  cool  adventures available, most of those cool adventures will absolutely suck and the predictions that MMOGs will suffer will be proved wrong yet again.

And for those who disagree and think that *NwN* and similar technology is capable of killing MMOGs, here s a little reminder:

 Large, nasty arrows fly at you from all directions from hidden and undetectable traps in the walls, floor and ceiling, piercing every part of your bodies and killing everyone in the party instantly.  You re all DEAD!  Hahahahahahahahahhaaaaaaa!


## *1.4   The Top Ten Things to Say To Insure Not Getting Hired in the Industry*

Volume 10, Issue 4
January 25, 2001

Everyone wants to work for a game company and make computer or video games.  Why in God s name that is true for anyone who really **knows anything about the business** (http://www.happypuppy.com/features/bth/bth0805a.html) is beyond me.  OK, I do know; it is

either the passion to create or because the thought of making games for a living just sounds too cool (and too easy; how tough can it be to make a game?. Right. Har de har har).

So it is inevitable that, whenever an entry-level development position opens up at a developer or publisher, dozens or even hundreds of resumes flow in, resulting in the need for many job interviews. We who are responsible for hiring new people dread these moments. Why? Because we know that we re going to interview multiple applicants and almost all of them are going to be completely inappropriate for the position at hand.

And I do mean  completely;  nothing like sorting through forty resumes and realizing that not one is right for the job, but that you ll interview at least three of them anyway, because you ve been ordered to fill the position by yesterday at the latest. So you interview, and the statements that can come out of the mouths of these babes in the woods can often be hysterical, but are always dead giveaways that the industry is attracting the same crowd that wanted to be a part of the French Revolution, after the fighting was over and guillotining had begun.

If you want to know what I m talking about, just take a gander at the Top Ten list below. To enhance your enjoyment of them, know this:

Each and every one of these statements, near as I can remember the wording, was spoken by an actual job candidate at an interview.

With no further ado, The Top Ten Statements To Insure Not Getting Hired in the Industry:

**Number 10:**  I ve played some of your games. I ve also been a dungeon master for ten years and I m probably one of the top ten DMs in the world. You guys really need me.

A 22 year-old floor clerk from CompUSA with no game design experience, applying for an entry-level design position.

**Number 9:**  I ve never played your game, but I have a degree in screenwriting from UCLA.

A Hollywood script doctor applying for that same design position.

**Number 8:**  Its just dots of light on a screen; you can t take that *too*  seriously, right?

The former producer of a failed TV sitcom, showing why his TV show failed while trying to break into PC games through an entry-level producer position.

**Number 7:**  Well, *technically*, no, I ve never actually programmed in C++ at work. But I ve read the book and I play around with it at home all the time.

A Visual Basic programmer from a credit union IT department, applying for a software engineer position for which the job description clearly stated a minimum of two years or more of C++ experience, and whose resume claimed three years of such experience.

**Number 6:**   I should tell you up front that I m a pacifist and won t work on code that has to do with guns or killing things.

An independent 3D engine programmer, applying for a position on a development team for the sequel of a world famous, best-selling first-person shooter.

**Number 5:**   Passionate?  You bet I m passionate; just ask my wife.  Hey, is that a job requirement?

A somewhat confused applicant, when asked if he was  passionate about what he did.   He was quickly assured that being passionate toward other team members was not a requirement, although a willingness to kiss ass was always appreciated.

**Number 4:**   Money, what else?  If you aren t doing it for money, you re a moron.

An applicant, when asked why he wanted to work in the games industry; he may have a point, but he sure made it at the wrong time and place.

**Number 3:**   Of course, I m qualified!  You know, I m a very good friend of the owner and I don t think he d like your attitude.

An applicant with no programming experience interviewing for a programming position, just as the company owner entered the conference room.  To which the owner, who never met the man before the interview, replied,  I ll see that he hears about it instantly.

**Number 2:**   I told the recruiter during the phone call that I wasn t qualified for this, but she said it was good money for both of us and if I would just play one of your games, it would be obvious I was just as qualified as any designer here.

A would-be designer, interviewing with a Lead Designer to work on the sequel to a Top Ten seller.

And the **Number 1** thing to say to insure not getting hired in the industry is:

 I know my salary requirements are high, but so are you guys if you think <the company s previous massively multiplayer online game> was good.

A 19 year old, second-year college student to a Producer, a VP and a Lead Engineer, asking for $150,000 a year to work as an entry-level tools programmer on a MMOG development project.

## 1.5   *Three Things to Understand About Online Gaming*

Volume 10, Issue 5
February 1, 2001

All human knowledge, **author Robert Heinlein** (http://home.t-online.de/home/herbsev/rah.htm)
wrote in *Expanded Universe*, is based on history, language and mathematics.

I believe that to be true; it seems pretty self-evident to me, in fact.  Each of the three plays a key
role in the accumulation, creation and/or transference of knowledge.  It is a three-legged stool, in
which each field of knowledge plays the role of a leg on that stool.  Take away any one leg and
the stool falls over and becomes far less useful.

I also believe the thought behind Heinlein s assertion can be made to work for MMOGs.  And
we do need some help.

1.  HISTORY:  One needs to understand where MMOGs have been and come from to
    understand where to go in the future.

The point Heinlein tried to make here is that if you don t understand the scope of history and
how something came to be that way over time, you are less likely to be able to make a truly
informed decision and or design an effective plan of action.

So it is with MMOGs.  It is important to understand how the industry and art got where it is
today, else how are we going to avoid the mistakes of the past?  I mention this because there
seems to be something of a trend among today s very successful developers to consider their
works seminal, or the 1$^{st}$ generation.

Bushwa.  I don t care how many times  Game God  Brad McQuaid tries to make it so by
saying it to an unthinking, parroting (and parrot-brained) game press; *EverQuest*, *Ultima
Online*, et al, are not  1$^{st}$ generation  massively multiplayer games.  They aren t even 2$^{nd}$
generation.

No, my friends, we are currently in the 3$^{rd}$ generation of MMOGs.  The 1$^{st}$ Generation began
about 1969 and was typified by the PLATO network games and the original Bartle/Trubshaw
MUD in 1978/79.  At the time,  massively multiplayer  was a bit of a misnomer, especially
compared to today s large player bases, but several games made the cut, thus creating the
seminal generation of MMOGs.

The 2$^{nd}$ generation was the expansion of those concepts into fully massively multiplayer
offerings during the period of about 1984 and to about 1997, with some experimentation in
client front-end graphics and vertical market niche games tossed for leavening.

If you wonder why this information is important, consider this:  If McQuaid and company
had researched and truly understood the history of MMOGs, would they have made so many
bush-league mistakes in customer relations with their first product?  I think not.

2.  LANGUAGES:  While we have a kinda-sorta working pidgin patois for MMOGs, we
    have not yet hit on a  language  that is easily understood.

Heinlein was talking about human, spoken languages, and how we communicate and exchange knowledge with each other across culture and spoken-word barriers. For example, if you can speak, read and/or think in German, you can better discern the nuances and subtleties of a work written in German or better understand what a German speaker is really saying.

The industry today is much like a group of separate nations, each speaking it s own tongue. This causes some confusion, even among the experienced professionals in the industry. We can t even agree on the terms we use for the various online games. Some call them MMOGs, some split out the vertical markets in MMRPGs and MMRTS, some use the term Persistent World or Persistent State World, etc. Trust me; it is even worse when it comes to discussing game and systems design or customer service issues.

In other words, we just don t have a common language that defines what the heck we are talking about in terms we can all understand. Until we do have one, we re going to be floundering around a bit. Maybe it is time for the industry to come together at a conference and define the language we ll be using five years from now.

3.  MATHEMATICS: We re actually doing much better here. Heinlein was referring to measurable results and using the common language of mathematics as tool for research and expansion of knowledge. It is a given around the world that, if you can t measure the results, it isn t science.

While programming is still a black art in many ways, it is based on measurable results in mathematics. So while we may be using various different programming, operating systems and graphics tools, you still have to be well-grounded in math to achieve accurate, measurable results in an MMOG.

What we don t have yet is MMOG s Einstein, Planck or Hawking, someone to be really artistic and take us to whole new levels. We haven t yet had the advantage of a quantum theory or relativity theory, something that really shakes up the whole world. It may be necessary to have entirely new programming tools or a new operating system on the back-end to make that happen.

Taken all together, this 3$^{rd}$ generation of online games is certainly expanding the horizon in terms of building the player base and creating knowledge in how to handle, technically, many thousands of users in a persistent game environment. It is an extremely evolutionary generation, a building-blocks generation, and a necessary one.

I can t help but wonder how different — and exciting! - the 4$^{th}$generation is going to be when it gets here, in five or six years

## *1.6  When Gamers Attack!*

Volume 10, Issue 6
PUBLICATION DATE: February 8, 2001

Security is in the news again and, like one of those strange, voyeuristic  reality  TV programs, what happens *to* the internet is becoming more interesting than what happens *on* it.

The reason the news is full of security talk is mainly because of **Denial of Service attacks** (http://www.cert.org/tech_tips/denial_of_service.html) and other cracker activities against some high profile Web sites.  Again.  Such events may not affect you personally each time they occur, but they should be of concern to you.  The plain fact of the matter is, Internet technology has some nasty weaknesses and people of low moral character have no problem trying to exploit them.  It happens in games as much as anywhere else and it s likely to get worse before it gets better.

The biggest news was about the biggest tech company around, the 800 ton gorilla that is Microsoft.  You know, the ubiquitous software giant that owns your computer, whether you like it or not?  Seems they ve had trouble with both DoS attacks and employees suffering the  Oops, did I press *that* button?  Syndrome lately.  A couple weeks ago, when Microsoft was hit by hackers and employee mistakes and had their Web complex driven from the Net for a time (like, the better part of four days), they issued a statement picked up by the press (http://news.cnet.com/news/0-1003-201-4615691-0.html?tag=mn_hd), part of which was:

"Unfortunately, as we have learned over the last few days, we did not apply sufficient self-defense techniques to our use of some third-party products at the front-end of parts of our core network infrastructure," the statement continued, without naming the products.

I love how MS plays the CYA game like a real pro (no, not the chat idiom for  See ya!  but the business jargon for protecting one s backside) and blames unnamed  third-party products.   As if MS products never have security holes, oh no!  Yet, CYA is pretty standard corporate activity when something bad happens; blame anyone but yourself.  Next, I expect someone to hire Saturday Night Live s **Mr. Subliminal** <http://snltranscripts.jt.org/scripts/86asubliminal.phtml> as the corporate spokesperson.  I can see it now:

**Reporter:**   What is the company s response to allegations that that security holes still exist in the company s products?

**Mr. Subliminal**:   While we may have had some small problems in the past —*Forget* — we have taken all reasonable measures to insure security — *Forget—* since then.  Did you have a—*Bathroom —* follow-up question?

**Reporter:**  I thought so, but I can t seem to remember it.  And I really have to go

Snide cheap shots aside, if you are more than an occasional online gamer, you know attacks and hacks are not limited to the likes of Microsoft, but happen to online games and game sites, too.  Attacks are common because it is fairly easy for a disgruntled gamer to get together with a couple of his friends and, by using an easily available Script Kiddie DoS script, flood a company s routers and bring an online game to it s knees.  And some gamers seem to view being disgruntled as a life style.

When gamers attack, however, it is more likely to be to gain an advantage. Every online game has it s weaknesses and some people with no self-esteem or self-respect just can t resist exploiting them. It could be a poorly programmed Retail Hybrid front end client that allows hack programs to make the cheater invincible, such as happened to the original *Diablo* on battle.net. This is annoying as hell for those of us who try to build characters online the old fashioned way, i.e. fairly. I don t mind if someone else has no self-respect; that s their problem. I do care when that lack of moral fiber manifests itself as the need to cheat to look superior, thereby destroying the joy of gaming for the rest of us. Frankly, these people are scum and I have to wonder what the hell the parents were doing for years instead of rearing their child.

With MMOGs, it can be a weakness in a backend database that allows a DoS attack to crash a server. This is most often used to try to create a time warp between the saved character on the server and the possessions currently on the character, in the hope that the time warp will duplicate the items in questions in both the bank vault and in the character s inventory. The fact that a few hundred other players might be affected is immaterial. In the worst case scenario, causing this to happen to a sufficiently large site can have **ripple effects across the whole Internet** (http://wired.lycos.com/news/business/0,1367,34234,00.html), in much the same way losing a MAE center can.

This tactic has worked entirely too well in the past, well enough that companies like Sony, Microsoft and EA have become way too familiar with the standard FBI procedures for such incidents. On the bright side, it is also a wake-up call to make security against such attacks a priority. They probably aren t entirely preventable, but at least the extremely small percentage of people willing to risk jail time to do this can be thwarted a bit.

What does that mean for you and me? Take that extremely small percentage noted above. It is probably far less than 1%, probably less than $1/10^{th}$ of a percent. So let s assume, for the sake of argument, that the $1/10^{th}$ of one percent is a true figure. I note that less than 8% of the world s population currently has Internet access. What happens in ten, twenty or thirty years, when six billion people have access?

What happens is that 600,000 barbarians will be standing at the gates, ready to try the latest gambit. And if that doesn t scare you, try this:

The more this happens, the more governments will use it for justification to track your every move on the Net. Security and safety, you know. If these attacks continue, there will come a day in the not-too-distant future when you will have no freedom to move untracked on the Internet.

I don t know about you, but I find that *really* scary.


## 1.7   *Singing the Bandwidth Blues*

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This one is going to be very long-winded and somewhat rambling (like you re surprised). One reason is that I chose to assume that some people reading this particular column need some background on the whole bandwidth issue. Another is that the refrain needs to be sung occasionally to cut through the silly hype about the future of the internet.

Bandwidth is a beautiful thing. Rather, having enough of it is. With enough bandwidth (or so the legend goes), latency would disappear and we could play all those Internet action games and flight simulators and have the frame rate actually match the data transmission rate. If they could do that, the gaming experience would jump by an order of magnitude on the "fun" index.

It's not that simple, of course; there are several contributing factors to Net's latency. No one questions, however, that having T-1 capacity bandwidth for each individual home user would allow us to greatly enhance the online game experience.

This is a serious issue to online game players, because we are notorious sucks. In our quest to eke out the very last bit of performance to improve the gaming experience (i.e. trying to get an unfair advantage over the next geek), we seek to suck every erg of performance from the PC and every bit of speed out of the Net. We ll overclock our computers, buy the latest video accelerator card, swap out motherboards so we can use the faster SDRAMs instead of DRAMs and add video and PC memory until the desktop sags.

And because speed is a necessary component to playing many games on the Net, we ll also buy the fastest modem available. Decreasing the lag time between issuing a command to a game server and receiving a response is of paramount importance to us. Games such as *Quake III Arena* are very intolerant of lag; almost as intolerant as online gamers, in fact. Speed is a misnomer, of course; we re actually referring to a modem s bandwidth transmission capacity.

That is probably more than most current modem users ever wanted to know about that particular piece of equipment. For all intents and purposes, speed is what they see or don t see on the Internet, and the difference between do see and don t see is all they really care about.

(This does not take into account that game designers rarely design online games with latency and bandwidth restrictions in mind. See **Greg Costikyan's excellent article** <http://www.crossover.com/fantwar/screed.html> for more discussion about this.)

If our online play experiences too much latency, we ll buy even faster modems and switch ISPs until we have the best possible connection to the Internet. I ve lost count of the number of modems I ve bought and $20 account set-up fees I ve paid to ISPs in the last few years. In the last three years alone, the count is at three modems and nine accounts.

In short, we hard core gamers have more money than common sense.

Of course, that propensity to spend money like water doesn t help us with the bandwidth issue. We have no control over how much copper or fiber is available to us once the data leaves our

modems, nor how clogged the bandwidth  pipes  are when we try to access various servers and sites to play games.

The press and the casual Net user have a tendency to think of bandwidth as the sole cause of latency on the Internet.  Unfortunately, latency has several causes besides lack of adequate bandwidth, including badly configured and obsolescent servers, outdated routers, the individual's modem (which adds anywhere from 30 to 120 milliseconds) and 'choke points' at certain sites on the Net, such as the Metropolitan Area Ethernets (MAEs).

However, it IS true that there isn't enough bandwidth to go around these days and that lack is a major contributor to the slowness of the Internet.  Remember, the Internet is a decentralized network; each individual site and provider is responsible for leasing and maintaining his own bit of bandwidth.  For most providers, that means one or more leased T-1 telephone connections, each of which has a maximum bandwidth capacity of about twenty-four 56k or forty-eight 28.8k connections.

If more people try to use that bandwidth, the performance is degraded.  Imagine a tunnel ten feet wide; two people can run side by side down the tunnel and reach the end at pretty much the same time.  Now imagine 100 people trying to enter the tunnel simultaneously; most of those people are going to reach the end of the tunnel far behind the two leaders.  The only two solutions are to convince fewer people to use the tunnel or expand the tunnel s width.  Of course, if you expand the width to handle those 100 runners, pretty soon the word will get out and 1,000 of them will try to squeeze into a space designed for 100.

Traffic jams such as these are daily occurrences on the internet, as sites receive hundreds or thousands of near-simultaneous "hits."  When this happens, the bandwidth available at the site is split among all those users, as the servers and routers try desperately to keep up with the commands and requests from all those users.  An individual may have a cable modem or DSL connection, but a Web or Internet site he/she is trying to communicate with may be so overloaded that it is responding at 2400 bps.  And this can occur at anywhere in the connection of hops between the player's home (called The Last Mile in the industry, denoting wiring from the nearest bandwidth head-end to the home) and the game site.  The more hops, the more likelihood for latency.

In 1986, when I shoehorned my way into this business, use of the available bandwidth wasn t an issue.  There were probably less than 700,000 home modem owners in the US, the Internet was virtually unknown outside of academic circles, bandwidth was everywhere and it didn t seem like we could ever use it all.  Until 1992, a modem upgrade from 1200 BPS to 2400 BPS, and from 2400 to 9600, showed dramatic results in download rates.

What a difference those nine years have made.  In 1992, there were maybe 10 million people using modems worldwide, almost all of them in the US, with over 95% of bandwidth use happening on online services and local BBSs.  Today, the number of people accessing the Internet and online services is almost certainly over 350 million (Nua, Ltd. estimates the number at over 400 million), with most of the bandwidth being used to access the World Wide Web.

This includes America Online, whose 26 million subscribers worldwide account for about 35% of all access to the WWW, according to Media Metrix.

What has this done to bandwidth availability?  Well, is the term  World Wide Wait  familiar?  In that short nine year period, we not only filled up all the available bandwidth pipes, we can t lay enough new copper, fiber and coaxial cable to keep up with the demand.  While several culprits contribute to latency, the main malefactor is us; we are using more bandwidth than is being laid.

It's not going to get better as soon as we want.  According to the US Commerce Department in an April 1998 report, traffic on the Internet is doubling every 100 days.  Think about that: About every three months, we are trying to jam twice the amount of data down the same pipes.  An Insight study late last year predicts that data packet demands are going to rise from about 6 billion to day to over 30 *trillion* within two years.

Now, compare this with an annualized bandwidth growth of 50%, as calculated by Nielsen s Law, created by noted Web usability expert Dr. Jakob Nielsen.  The math does not look good: Every 100 days, we are adding only 12.5% of the bandwidth needed to handle traffic growth. What that all means for us gamers is: Things are going to get worse for a while, not better.

Someday, this may all even out.  At some point, the curves between computer power, Net access speeds and bandwidth growth will intersect.  Dr. Nielsen expects computer power and bandwidth to intersect in 2003, with average Web speeds 57 times faster than in 1998 and the high-end user having capacity equal to a T-1 telephone leased line and the low-end user having ISDN capacities.

That estimate is a bit enthusiastic for my tastes.  If the past fifteen years have shown me anything, it's that nothing to do with relief from technology bottlenecks happens as fast as anyone thinks it will.  For example, in 1978, everyone thought there would be a personal computer in every home in the US by the year 2000.  At the end of 2000, the count stands at abut 50% of US homes.

My educated guess is that it is unlikely we'll see any real, substantive relief from the Bandwidth Blues before the year 2008.  And that relief will occur only if the telephone companies and cable companies not only continue to lay lots of new fiber, but actually carry through with their teases to accelerate the installation amounts and rates.  If they don't lay a whole bunch of new fiber and cable, it doesn't really matter what the capacity is at the home user end.  Without enough bandwidth at both The Last Mile and cross-country in general, data is still going to hit traffic jams out in the Great Internet Cloud.

In fact, a build up of capacity on the Last Mile without a general build up of bandwidth capacity in backbones and Web sites in general would be a disaster.  Imagine lots of huge pipes trying to feed data into medium or small-sized pipes.  I shudder just to think of it.

What does all this mean for online games?  Bandwidth is one of the main limiting factors for our industry to provide an online gaming experience with the speed, performance and compelling nature of the best solo computer games.  With enough bandwidth available, we could actually get

creative in interesting ways. I'm beginning to suspect that online gaming, and especially persistent world gaming, won't really take off until we can provide a TV or movie quality experience. Imagine:

- Being able to add new, multi-megabyte sections to an online game on the fly as a player approaches an entry point to the scenario, done completely transparent to the player;

- Allowing players to tie into team chat channels with both real-time, 32 frames per second or more video with accompanying audio, leaving the hands free to issue game commands instead of typing chat messages;

- Having human-run game actors communicate clues or lead quests by the same video/audio link. Talk about making the game experience more like TV or the movies: Imagine an actor showing up in the 'flesh' to lead a spontaneous one hour adventure for five or six *Ultima Online* or *EverQuest* players.

These are just three possibilities; I'm sure you can think of more. Someday, we will no doubt reach this plateau where bandwidth, computer power, server and router efficiency and access speeds will meet.

It can't happen soon enough for me but, as I stated above, it isn't likely to happen for a long while.


## 1.8   Boy-Toy is as Boy-Toy Does

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To paraphrase that great philosopher, **Yosemite Sam**
([http://www.nonstick.com/sounds/Yosemite_Sam.html](http://www.nonstick.com/sounds/Yosemite_Sam.html)):

 Men are *so* stupid.

For years, analysts and executives at PC and video game companies, a subsection of the business species that is overwhelmingly male, tried to figure out how to get more women to buy more games for themselves. Their usual customer base is something near the 12 to 35 year old male and they d like a wider selection of customers, thank you, because that means more money in their pockets.

Nothing wrong with wanting to make more money off the female market, but they never had any success figuring out how to make it happen intentionally. As dictated by the Law of the General Perversity of the Universe, it happened anyway. Indeed, a 1999 IDSA study claimed that 43% of the market for PC games was female, with 35% of the market being women who played video console games. More recent studies have indicated that slightly over 50% of online gamers are women.

OK, so now more women are playing games.  That still leaves the males who overwhelmingly dominate Executive Row in this industry, some of whom have been  leading  us for 15 years and more, with a perplexing question: why?  They look at the figures and see that women play a wide assortment of online fare, such as card games and trivia games and a darn good share of the MMOG subscription market.  Then they scratch their heads and say to each other,  Do *you* know why?  Should we make more card games?   At that point, they just look at each other, shrug and head for the nearest strip club, where they slip dollar bills in the dancers  thong panties and, in between treating each other to lap dances, continue the discussion about how to figure out why women play games.

Well, wonder no more, m lads; the answer is simple.  If you can stop playing Motor Boat for a moment and pull your face from between that lap dancer s breasts, I ll tell you:

> We play the same games you do, for pretty much the same reasons you do.  The only difference between then and now is that more of us have access to computers and consoles these days.

Get the picture?  We re individuals, just like you guys, and that means we have individual preferences.  Quit lumping women into one large box, as if all women had the same tastes and there was some magical formula or equation that can be tapped to make us buy games.  You don t make those kind of assumptions with the male population, do you?  Heck, no; you do all sorts of studies and focus groups and figure out what minute male demographic subsections of the 12 to 35 year old group want in a game.

And what they want is, surprise! just what you young bucks want: Big tits, big guns or both.  Hate to tell ya, but just as not every male player is akin to John Romero, we re not all like Stevie Case (as much as you d like us all to get our breasts pumped up until our chins have a perpetual bruise).  Like the population at large, we fall into different categories and like different things.

This is not a new thing, guys.  It has always been this way.  Forget the tired old argument that we grew up playing with Barbie and you grew up with G.I. Joe and that means we are soft and gentle and you are hard and aggressive; it means nothing in the long run.  Come on; do you still play dolls?  I sure don t.  And if you think G.I. Joe was tough, you should see Barbie in a cat-fight; Joe wouldn t last two seconds.

It goes even deeper.  When we were growing up, we watched the same TV shows and movies and read the same books you did.  And I tell you truly: just like you, we secretly wanted to command a starship like Jim Kirk and Jean-Luc Picard, be secret government agents like James West, float down the Mississippi on a raft like Huck and Tom or save lives on the operating table like Dr. Kildare.  Forget that they were all men; the *idea* of the adventure and being able to do something we couldn t do in real life was what mattered.

So, is it any wonder that when you build hard-core gamer products with little adventure and such lovely teenage male wet-dream features as dancing strippers or buffed-out babes with Himalayan breasts, that we avoid them in favor of something with at least a little substance?  And it doesn t come down to those tired old clich s about women wanting social games and men wanting bang-

bang games.  Note that as more publishers branch out into products that feature some adventure and/or originality, sales spike for both males and females.  Like with *Diablo II*, *Half-Life* and *The Sims*, million-plus sellers all.

Or look at the online games, of which the best solo games bear a striking resemblance in one form or another and which are populated by 50% females.  The women run around with swords and shields in *EverQuest* and *Ultima Online*, too, just like the men.  Why?  Gee, you don t suppose it s because there are more opportunities for making up an interesting adventure or intrigue, do you?  Probably just coincidence, right?

Yeah, right.  You can go back to playing Motor Boat now.


## 1.9   The Market Isn t in Kansas Anymore

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Verant Interactive (http://www.verant.com/) gets a lot of press for being the largest of the MMOGs with over 300,000 subscribers and 70,000+ simultaneous players for *EverQuest* (http://www.station.sony.com/everquest/).  That certainly represents one of the most successful online games of all time and is nothing to sneer at.

However, would it surprise you to know that US-based *EverQuest* s subscriber base is many times smaller than the world s largest?  And that the MMOG with the world s largest subscriber and player base was developed and is hosted in South Korea, of all places?

Yeah, me, too; go figure.  ***Lineage: the Blood Pledge*** (http://www.lineagethebloodpledge.com/pr/) is a medieval RPG developed by South Korean ISP NCSoft and is to be hosted in the US by their subsidiary, NC Interactive.  As of January, 2001, Lineage claimed some 10 million registrations, peak usage of between 110,000 and 140,000 simultaneous players, 33% of the South Korean market and revenues of $4 to $5 million US per month.  That figure would be wildly impressive if expressed in the South Korean Won, which trades at about 1,238 Won to one US Dollar.

I m pretty clued in to the industry, but this one took me by complete surprise.  I had real trouble swallowing those figures, even though I was aware that the Asian market for MMOGs, and RPGs in particular, is fairly large and growing.  For example, *Ultima Online* locates nearly half of it s shard server clusters in Asia, including several in South Korea.  I was so skeptical of the *Lineage* numbers, in fact, that I started asking around to my friends in the industry, some of whom make trips to South Korea and Japan a couple times a year.  What I learned from my friends is that the figures NCSoft released for *Lineage* are accurate and that these numbers are causing a land rush among Asian companies to get a game up on the  Net.

For a parochial gal who has seen that American MMOG players will spend anyone into the ground in search for entertainment, this is weird beyond belief.  The weirdness doesn t stop there; something I find utterly fascinating, probably because it is so different from the US

MMOG culture that I am used to, is how *Lineage* players in South Korea access the game.  They don t log in from home, as players in the US and Europe tend to do.  No, the overwhelming majority of *Lineage* players log in from Internet caf s.

Thin about that for a moment.  Over 100,000 simultaneous players at peak hours, and most of them are logging in from a cyber-caf .  Who over here knew that South Korea had that many online game players in the first place, much less that many Internet caf s and chairs near computers?  Heck, I m not sure there are even 100,000 seats in Internet caf s in the US.  Just to add to the discomfort, Lineage defies the current  3D 1$^{st}$ person or die  mantra; it s 10 million subscribers play on an isometric interface similar to that of *Ultima Online*.

As the title of this column implied, all of this shows that we aren t in Kansas anymore; the nature of the market is changing.  Up to now, it has all been  the US this  and  The US that.  Americans have a lot of disposable income and tend to spend it (savings account levels on a nationwide basis are at an all-time low), and also tend to be among the early adopters for new technologies.  More Americans per capita can afford a home computer than pretty much any nation in the world, not to mention $10 to $20 a month for Internet access.  This makes it relatively easy to offer a game online aimed at US customers, with a reasonable expectation of some level of success. Thus, the press follows.

In Asia, outside of Japan, the impression is that things aren t in such good shape.  Income levels are lower, hence disposable income is generally lower, and cutting edge technology in the home is less pervasive.  The South Koreans, at least, have found a way around these limitations.  If they don t own computers at home, provide a home for the computers.  Bingo; we sneer at your mere 300,000 users, silly Americans!

It has certainly created a larger market for MMOGs than in the US.  Predictably, conglomerates such as the $40 billion behemoth SK are creating online game divisions and trying to cash in, and more of the smaller ISPs and telecom firms are joining in.  Just a few days ago, Japanese telecom firm Pacific Century CyberWorks Ltd announced their entry into online games with a $48 million cash and stock deal with U.S. company Circadence, in which PCCW would take over Circadence s somewhat moribund VR-1 developer unit (http://www.vr1.com/) to produce games for the Asian market.

Nothing strange about any of that; when a market is revealed, someone will try to exploit it.  To have somehow, up to this time, missed these developments, which have important ramifications for the industry as a whole, is somewhat stunning.  To paraphrase Jack Nicholson s character in the movie *A Few Good Men*,  Don t I feel like the <expletives deleted>.

It also means that US developers, which until now have led the MMOG revolution, had better learn something about the differences in play between the US market and the Asian market, or their games are going to be relegated to the status of  small backwater, good for a couple bucks when we get around to it.

And here I was just getting around to **learning conversational French,** (http://www.happypuppy.com/features/bth/bth%2Dvol9%2D15.html), after Infogrames acquired Hasbro Interactive.

## 1.10  Rape  By Any Other Name

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The online game equivalent to forcible rape is a hot debate topic again.

Yes, it is PK/PD time again.  On message boards and in email lists that focus on this sort of
thing, there has been quite a lot of debate the past two weeks on Player Killing (PK) and Perma-
Death (PD) in massively multiplayer games.  Since MMOGs started making money, this has
been a perennial subject on player message forums and  pro  design and developer lists, with
plenty of  verbal  slap-downs and posts that begin with such left-handed politeness as  With all
due respect, you re $*&^ing nuts.   Whenever it crops up, it is quite intense for a period of time,
as the partisans for and against PK and PD grapple vocally with the ASCII equivalent of rusty
knives, chains and two-by-fours with a railroad spike through one end.  Then it dies down again,
as the participants retreat to their strongholds to heal up from the battle and prepare to charge in
again.

This is not a topic that is likely to ever go away.  If you ve followed the discussions on these
topics in the past, you know the current debate has been lively, to say the least.  What brought
about this latest iteration was an **article written for UK magazine Edge Online**
(http://www.edge-online.co.uk/news_main.asp?news_id=3416) by pioneering online game
designer/developer Dr. Richard Bartle, co-creator of the original MUD that started this whole
online-only game industry in the first place.  In it, Dr. Bartle proposes that games without PD
cannot provide a sense of achievement in the long term, because they eventually max out their
characters, get bored and leave.  He compares it to a race in which the players are attached to a
long bungee cord; the last few steps can be tough to make, but you eventually get there.  Once
you do, what then?  He also brings up an old argument, that PK and PD add conflict to a game,
and that conflict is a necessary part of any drama.  Or, in his words,  A game without loss is no
game.

Before I go on, let me state that I ve known Richard for about nine years, having been first
introduced to him through Bridgette Patrovsky, who brought *MUD II* to the States when she was
President of the Access 24 online service.  The man is truly a pioneer and, for all that the
Johnny-Come-Latelies like to send arrows his way (you can usually pick the true pioneers out of
the crowd by counting the arrows sticking out their body), he is still one of the masters.

And shoot arrows they do, because it s easier to hit a target willing to stand on an outcropping
and risk them.  I find it ironic that many of the professionals taking exception with Dr. Bartle s
views do it only in the safe confines of closed mailing lists, not on public boards where they, too,
might have to dodge multiple castings of the Oaken Shaft of Piercing (+5).  Whether you
consider him right or wrong, The Good Doctor has never been shy about his views on PD and
PK, and they have influenced (and continue to influence) a number of designers.  Including a
couple of those responsible for the first iteration of *Ultima Online*, which in the early days
tended to resemble a newbie decimation factory more than a game.

Beyond all that, we should also remember that it is people like Bartle that have pushed the envelope and made these games possible at all. We don t have to agree, but it certainly pays to listen when they are attempting to push the envelope again.

And I do tend disagree with Richard on the pure *need* for PD and PK when it comes to commercial games, i.e. for-pay MMOGs; a sufficiently robust design can handle conflict without them. The needs of commercial games that must support hundreds of thousands of subscribers, each of whom feels that their $10 a month should give them a significant voice in the game and most of whom don t rank themselves as player killers, are far different than those of free MUDs aimed at a limited number of players. In a free MUD, you can get away with anything, because the objectives of the implementers are learning the ropes and trying to create art; in the final analysis, they don t really care if they have 100 players or 10,000.

In a for-pay game, the objectives have to be entertainment and *making money* (**editor: keep italics, please**, **and remove this notice**). You can sometimes create art and have it be entertaining, but not often, and a whole lot less often in a medium that is participatory, not just sitting in a chair and watching. And you can bet the people who shell out $8 to $12 million for development of a commercial MMOG damn well want a chance at getting their money back. Nonconsensual violence doesn t fit that bill. Just as people tend to avoid crime-ridden sections of a city, they tend to avoid  crime-ridden  online games, too.

You can still work PD and PK into a game, as long as it is consensual. To me, this debate all boils down to one point for commercial MMOGs, which Bartle edged around in his article with mentions of  badlands  where PK and PD could take place:

<blockquote>If it isn t consensual, it s rape.</blockquote>

In other words, if it isn t the player s choice to place the character s life and possessions in harm s way, he has no real control of the situation and when you re paying money, you want some control. Nothing like leaving the confines of a town and getting ganked multiple times by one or more players waiting to do just that. Most people don t find that entertaining, as *UO* showed; it is no coincidence that the retention level of that game stalled until changes were made to slow down the efficacy of PKs, nor that there was a leap in retention after they were implemented.

All the other issues pertaining to keeping the player entertained — achievement, growth of character,  badlands  with more challenge and reward, what have you — are design issues. If your MMOG has interesting beginning and middle games, but nothing for the high-level character, of course they will eventually leave, whether PK/PD is there or not.

So, really, it comes down to a lack of interesting design elements throughout the game for all levels of players, not some visceral  need  for PK and PD. Conflict doesn t have to be  life-threatening  to be interesting, nor does  loss  have to be loss of life, limb and/or property. Conflict has to have a greater meaning or it is just useless, tiresome slaughter. In other words, just plain PK and PD, in and of themselves, lack the ability to create meaningful context.

What do I mean?  Well, were the bad guys in *North by Northwest* chasing and trying to kill Cary Grant just to sell his clothes on eBay?  Of course not; he knew something about them, they wanted that knowledge to die with him and *he didn t know what it was he knew*.  That made for suspense as he continually looked over shoulder to see if the bad guys were coming.  Nor did Humphrey Bogart kill to acquire the travel papers in *Casablanca*, or try to auction them off to the highest bidder; when the time came, as the vultures began to close in and the temptation to use them for his personal gain was strong, he gave them away to promote a higher good.

That is context; it gives actions a meaning beyond  I rOxXoR U, d00d!   What would give more excitement to a game session, dodging PKs just because they exist, or dodging them because you have volunteered to deliver food to a starving village down the road?  One conflict is chosen for you, without your consent; the other you have chosen because it gives meaningful context to your action.  One is dangerous as hell and entertaining; the other is dangerous as hell and a pain in the butt.

Which one sounds more fun to you?

## 1.11 Told Ya

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This is both a kind of  I told you so  and yet another lesson in the dangers of ignoring history.  You ll see why later in the column, and it won t be for the reason you think.

If you ll harken back six months (yes, I know, that s more like three years in Internet time), you ll remember that I wrote an opinion about the market chances of Wolfpack s **upcoming MMOG,** *Shadowbane* (http://www.happypuppy.com/features/bth/bth%2Dvol9%2D23.html).  You ll also remember that some rabid *Shadowbane* fans — you know, all those people who have never played the game because it doesn t exist, but like it anyway — filled my mailbox to overflowing with **love letters and approbation** (http://www.happypuppy.com/features/bth/bth%2Dvol9%2D27.html).

It now is starting to appear that those loyal fans that have never played the game they most love may remain just that, something of a *Romeo and Cyberet* unrequited love story.  As we go forward, please bear in mind that this falls into the realm of speculation, for reasons that will soon become apparent.

In mid-February, arcadian del sol of Lum The Mad first broke the rumor (http://www.lumthemad.net/news/1744.php) that **Take 2 Interactive** (http://www.take2games.com/public/frameset.jhtml), an equity owner in Gathering of Developers Games and publisher of record for *Shadowbane*, was dropping it from the list.  Naturally, this caused a bit of a twitter among all those fans, many of whom, interestingly, assumed that the first reports were true, even before Wolfpack had an opportunity to respond.  This was either an excellent example of the fickle nature of online gamers, or these fans, which

had regular contact with Wolfpack on message boards, had some reason to accept the rumor at face value.

This kind of thing happens all the time in this industry, so normally I would just wait for some further news.  This attitude of doomed acceptance among the fan base got me interested, however, so I started nosing around for confirmation.  The normally vocal Wolfpack was strangely silent about the rumor, and who could blame them?  Rumor is as rumor does and all that.  However, no comment, after many months of going out of their way to be as vocal as possible about what was going on, only lent credence to the rumor in the minds of the fans.  So I began checking various other info sites, but none had any further information.  It began to look like just another one of those things that seems to spring full-born out of nowhere, only to die soon thereafter.

Then, in the normal course of business interaction with colleagues, four people with reason to be in the know on this issue confirmed that they, too, had heard the rumor, and all from different sources.  One of these informants is someone I ve known for over a decade and I trust this person s word explicitly.

OK, so now, out of the blue, I have second-hand, hearsay confirmation of the rumor from four sources.  Lots of rumors based on second-hand information get printed in newspapers every day (Remember the initial stories about Watergate, or Drudge s break about Lewinsky?), but that isn t the same as having it confirmed first-hand, i.e. from Wolfpack, GoD or Take 2.  So I dropped a line to J. Todd Coleman and Sean Dahlberg, Wolfpack s VP of Sales and Marketing and the Internet Relations Manager respectively, and asked them.  I also dropped a line to GoD Games  PR contacts, as listed on their Web site.

Wolfpack s Coleman responded pretty quickly with  Once again, it isn't our policy to comment on rumors.˚ If any significant changes in our publishing arrangements arise then we'll make a public announcement to that effect.   OK, fair enough, although it did smell a bit like he was setting things up for an announcement later.  GoD s PR people didn t even bother to respond with that much.

At this point, I decided to just let the matter sit; it was pretty obvious I wasn t going to get anything approaching a first-hand confirmation and I was just a tad uncomfortable going with what I had.  It was tempting to go with it anyway, but I wanted at least a hard fact or two to back it up.

On March 13, those facts arrived.  Lum posted **new information about the issue** (http://www.lumthemad.net/news/1805.php), noting that retailers were being asked by Take 2 to delist the game and stop taking  pre-orders.  This is a pretty good indicator that one of two things has happened:

1) The product was pulled from pre-order because the ship-to-retail date had slipped past the Christmas selling season, or;

2) The product was delisted, i.e. no longer to be published.

Much **speculation about the future of *Shadowbane* ensued
([http://wire2k.phpwebhosting.com/wwwthreads/showflat.php?Cat=&Board=comments&Number=5757&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part](http://wire2k.phpwebhosting.com/wwwthreads/showflat.php?Cat=&Board=comments&Number=5757&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part)=)** and, as of the date of this writing (March 17), still no definitive word has come from Take 2, GoD or Wolfpack.  At this point, either 1) or 2) is as likely as the other.  One has to wonder, though: if 1), slippage, is the reason, why the information embargo?  Curious, indeed.

And this is where the  I told you so  history lesson comes in.  No, it has nothing to do with my *Shadowbane* column from last year and everything to do with my constant refrain that the people entering the online games industry refuse to learn a damn thing from it s history until it bites them on the butt.

At a conference in San Francisco in September 1997, I sat on a panel about the future of online games with, among others, GoD head-honcho Mike Wilson, at that time not yet a Todd Porter coup d etat victim at start-up Ion Storm.  At the time of the conference, Wilson was fresh off his major success for id Software, the innovative marketing of *Quake* products that created huge sales numbers.  He was getting plenty of personal press and, not unusually for the computer game industry s version of the nouveau riche , was a bit full of himself.  Granted, he had some reason to be so.

One question asked of the panelists was who would succeed or fail in online games in the next five years.  My opinion was that the big publishers of retail and console games wouldn t be the initial winners.  They d try and fail, as online games and especially MMOGs were outside their core competencies.  So, because online games were both a product and a service, the people and companies that then had experience in both developing them and then running them after launch would be the sure winners, in some form or another.  At that point, Wilson leaned toward a microphone and said,  The winners will be companies like ours, who know how to develop top games.

Being ever the shy wallflower, I immediately replied,  You don t know what you re talking about.  Companies like yours will try and fail; then you ll hire the people with experience to fix your mistakes.   That garnered me a half-grin and a shake of the head from Wilson.  It was the first and last time we ve interacted on the issue.

So here we are, three and a half years later, and we all know what happened.  After entering the market and getting smacked around by their own inexperience, especially on the service side, the big publishers like EA, Sierra and Sony wised up.  They are currently preparing for the future by acquiring the experienced online game developers or picking them clean of experienced employees.  History repeats itself again, and it is getting boring to watch.

Meanwhile, Wilson and GoD are either on the verge of aborting their first real attempt into the commercial online game market space, or learning the lesson that making successful Retail Hybrids like *Quake* means nothing when it comes to developing and servicing games for the commercial online market.  Either way, all I can do is give a half-grin, shake my head and say:

Told ya.


## 1.12 Rearranging the Deck Chairs

Volume 10, Issue 12
PUBLICATION DATE: April 5, 2001


If you follow the industry at all, by now you ve aware of what former employees are calling the  Black Wednesday Massacre.   On March 21, Electronic Arts, apparently bleeding money from the EA.com online games operation and having recently acquired 150 new employees via the pogo.com buy-out, slashed around 200 jobs, including 85 at *Ultima Online* developer Origin Systems and some 40 at the former Kesmai Corporation offices in Virginia.  That 200 number is the official figure; insiders say the damage was greater and that more carnage is to come.

In the process, EA also shuttered one of the most highly anticipated MMOGs in the industry, *Ultima Worlds Online: Origin,* also known as  The Game formerly known as UO2.   Last year I picked UWO:O as a **sure bet to be a winner** (http://www.happypuppy.com/features/bth/bth%2Dvol9%2D39.html).  Silly me; I should have added,  If it is released.   And let me cover some bets right now by saying that  *Anarchy Online*, another game I picked as a probabe winner and currently in testing, seems to have some design flaws in the architecture and game systems that may limit it s popularity (CYA Alert!  CYA Alert!).

Just to round out the insanity, as I write this column, Infogrames is in the process of releasing the entire Hasbro Interactive Dungeons and Dragons Online MMOG Team in Austin, some 22+ people.  The Austin online game community has thus suffered the loss of about 107 jobs in one short week, going from the MMOG Mecca to a wasteland of lost developers.  Ouch.

Quite aside from the folly of releasing a couple hundred experienced online developers from your online effort and back into the marketplace, one has to wonder where EA, Infogrames and, indeed, the entire industry, is heading.  On the verge of the true Internet online gaming revolution, we seem to be bucking for the Mass Market and pulling back from the one model that actually makes money, the massively-multiplayer subscription games.  I can understand why; it is scary for a publisher to contemplate spending $10 to $12 million to launch an MMOG in an industry used to spending maybe $4 million to ship a solo home game to the retail shelf (not to mention all the projects that have $1 to $2 million spent on them and which never ship).  It would scare me, too.

However, when you consider the upside to these games, that even a moderately successful one such as *Ultima Online* can gross well over $20 million a year and contribute $8 to $10 million to the bottom line, year after year after year  development of one or two seems like a no-brainer to me.  And if you garner a hit such as *EverQuest*, with 360,000 monthly, loyal subscribers, hoo boy!  The annual meeting is in the Caribbean, kids!

But, no; the Holy Grail is the Mass Market consumer.  Unfortunately, you aren t going to Caribbean on the backs of the Mass Market consumers, simply because there is no business

model.  The banner ad market is in a shambles and Mass Market consumers won t pay for content.  Maybe someday they will, but no one knows when, how or why.  Naturally, this is a signal to the industry to avoid money-making MMOGs and develop money-losing Mass Market online games.  Eh?

Concerning MMOGs, I tell the industry now what stock analysts are telling jittery investors:

The time to buy in is *now*; it s never going to be cheaper to get in.

For those waiting for broadband to kick off the Mass Market spending spree, as if that transport technology were some sort of business model, I urge the industry to consider some key facts concerning online gaming over the next five to ten years:

**KEY FACT #1:  This is a marathon, not a sprint.**

Of the world s population of about 6 billion, only about 400 million are Internet-connected.  Over 5 billion people:  That s a boat-load of potential gamers who haven t even connected up yet.  It seems likely that at least another billion of them will connect up in the next five years.  That s over triple the users we have now, and should represent at least a doubling of annual online gaming subscription revenues.

What that means is the people who get in now, create loyal customers and internal knowledge bases about how online game development is done, have a better chance to be the big winners later on down the line.  That also means having the will to compete over the long term and a willingness to spend some money.

If you don t, then the few companies that are spending now, such as EA and Sony/Verant, win by default.

**KEY FACT #2:  We aren t building the games people want to play online.**

From experience, we know that about 10% of any connected population is potentially willing to pay for some kind of game-related content; the trick has always been to figure out what that content is and provide it.

We ve had OK, but not overwhelming, success at doing that.  According to industry, some 4 to 6 million consumers world-wide buy most of the console and PC games sold; they are the same people most likely to pay subscription fees for online games.  Inside, we call these folk the  Hard Core.   Of the Hard Core group, we ve only managed to get about 680,000, or a little over 10%, to pay for MMP online games regularly, although something closer to 1.4 million, slightly over 20%, have actually tried them on for size.

This should tell us that A) we aren t building the online games that even most of the Hard Core group wants to play, and, B) we certainly aren t building games that attract the next 20% of the market, the Moderate player, who is the consumer most willing to move up into the Hard Core and spend more money online.

In other words:  Anyone with two active brain cells, an ability to learn from the mistakes of others and some development money is in a position to make a killer MMOG.

Of course, everyone seems to be waiting for broadband, so they can build products more likely movies and TV that will appeal to the sainted Mass Market.  The problem with that is:

**KEY FACT #3:  There won t be a mass market for online gaming until it is far easier to connect and play.**

In case anyone didn t notice, the market for PCs is down.   Way down.  Like, lower than whale snot down.  Looking at a chart of PC manufacturer stock prices is like looking at a portrait of a man jumping off a cliff.  The question is, why?  After all, we haven t near reached the saturation point for PCs, even in the US.

My opinion on this is two-fold:

1. **PC hardware and the Windows OS are still just too clunky, bud-ridden and difficult for most people to use.**  Replacing a video card or hard drive may be easy to you and me, but to most people it s a hassle.  And software instability: Nothing irritates me more than having Windows crash on me, then having to stare at Scan Disk for several minutes, all the while reading Microsoft s cynical message about how I should always shut the computer down properly to avoid having to read the message again.

The plain fact is, our hardware and software is still to weird and unstable for over half the households in the US, much less the rest of the world.  Those of us dedicated to building and/or playing games, we are quite willing learn what we need to know.  Other people look at the situation and say,  I don t have the time or inclination to be that pissed off, thanks.

2. **PCs and software still cost too much.**  $500 to $1,000 for a decent PC is still too much to spend for most people.  Beyond that, consumers are not stupid and understand that PC makers, peripheral makers and software developers keep playing the Upgrade Shell Game on us.  You know the drill; if you ll just spend a few hundred dollars to get the latest video card, OS, motherboard or completely new system, all the problems we created for you previously will be fixed.  Honest.  Really.  No kidding, this time we got it figured out.

Until the equipment and software needed to get online and play is simpler, more reliable and cheaper, growth in the Mass Market sector will be slower than everyone would like.  And there is no telling when it this transformation is likely to happen.

It may be that relatively low cost next generation video consoles, such as the PS2 and the XBox, are the first step.   The problem with set-tops and game consoles for online play is that they lack the means to effectively connect individuals with each other.  A huge chunk of online game play is about socializing with friends, guild/teammates or whoever happens to be in the immediate

area of the game.  Without a keyboard, that s kind of tough.  When voice over data technology is shipped with the boxes, the problem is solved, but that is going to take years.

So what do we end up with out of all this?  A Mass Market that won t arrive for about five years and which will probably show up without a business model.  On the other hand, we already have a money-producing market for subscription-based MMOGs that is still wide open.  It is a choice between definitely losing money now on the hope of making more later, or risking money now in a market niche that is proven to produce revenue.

The choice seems pretty simple to me; why doesn t it look that way to the publishers?

## 1.13 This is the end  this is the end, my friend.

Volume 10, Issue 13
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This is a tough BTH to write.  After over two years as part of the Happy Puppy pack, this will be the last column for this site.

They ve been two pretty damn good years.  Ninety-six columns worth of ideas, opinions, responses to reader email and the occasional dogfight with various and sundry special interest groups  yeah, its been fine.  I ve thoroughly enjoyed myself and I m sad to see it end.

The reason for it is no secret.  The Globe, parent company of Happy Puppy, has been hit as hard as everyone else by the crash of the banner advertising market.  However, unlike some large game news sites, which have parents with deep pockets to keep them going, The Globe stands alone, a cyber-version of Horatio at the bridge, if you will.  The company has held things together better than most over these last six months, preserving 200 jobs while others folded the tent completely and laid of hundreds.

But even the good guys sometimes have to bow to the inevitable.  They ve recently had to lay off some of the staff and tighten the belt, which is a whole lot better than just shutting down.  This is not a happy time to be a content site; at a time when mere survival is counted as a victory, they survive.

But not so this column, unfortunately.  Part of the belt-tightening means a certain freelance column must go.  And truth to tell, I can t I say I disagree; when you re trying to ensure the company s survival long-term, you do what you must and cut costs where you have to.  When you re laying off your friends, it s kind of hard to justify paying people like me to continue writing.

I haven t decided if the column will reappear elsewhere.  As some readers are aware, BTH has been around since April 1997, first on the old GamerGals site, then on Gamebytes in mid-1998 and then Happy Puppy since February 1999.  I wasn t paid to write the column until Happy Puppy picked it up; it began as most volunteer efforts do, a labor of love.  Well, that and the sick, twisted need to see my own opinions in print somewhere.

So it may be that I ll decide to move the column to a new site; once you re addicted to the written word, its tough to give it up.  Meanwhile, as I croon an old Doors tune on the way out the virtual door, I feel compelled to make a few predictions and general comments about online games:

- You will be paying for content.

The glory days of the  Internet land grab  and tons of free stuff is over.  The banner ad market might come back, but not for years, if ever.  In the meantime, if you want decent content from all but the two or three biggest corps with the deepest pockets, the only way content sites are going to be able to afford to give it to you is A) if they can get companies to pay for it, or B) if *you* pay for it.  And lord knows you guys are cheap bastards.

In other words, folks, the free ride is over.  Start deciding what you will and won t pay for and be prepared to vote with your pocketbook.  And as they say in politics,  Vote early and often.

If you don t, you ll end up with Microsoft, Sony/Verant and Electronic Arts determining what online games you will and won t be offered.  And you ll bitch to high heaven about, but only have yourself to blame.

- "They were extremely arrogant, considering how little they knew about the digital world."

That quote from Jim Choate of SF Gate referred to those who worked at the late and unlamented NBCi, but it could apply to the front office at just about every game publisher now attempting to produce online games.  As a group, I ve never met more people who knew less about their business, or were less willing to listen.

The arrogance doesn t slow them down one bit.  One reason there isn t a lot of compelling content on the Web right now is that the people running these companies haven t a clue who the customer really is and what he ll pay for.  They all aim for the legendary Mass Market, even though there is no business model there yet and probably won t be for years.  On the other hand, the one model that actually works and makes money, subscription gaming, is treated like a pariah.   Cause, you know, it takes real development money to make one of those things.  This is just another case of pennywise and pound-foolish.

What that quote really means is: You can expect some high profile failures, both in games and game companies.  And the people who will pay the price are the ones who always do, not the executives making the decisions, but the people in the trenches trying to make it work.

- Game publishers are waiting for broadband to revolutionize online games by being able to shove more data down the pipe.  This is a HUGE mistake.

The senior executives at game publishers talk about how broadband will allow richer content, more options in what to download to then player, a cooler overall experience, yadda yadda

yadda.  Broadband isn t being treated like a data transport mechanism, but as a business model.  You know, make the Internet more like TVs and movies.

That s all just so much useless buzz-meistering.  It reminds me of 1994, when everyone thought banner advertising was *it* and rushed to make it a reality.  I remember pointing out to an investor in 1996 that over 95% of banner advertising wasn t bought, but was bartered between sites with no actual dead presidents changing hands; eventually, real money would have to be spent or the house of cards would have to crash.  He gave me a look that clearly said,  Shut up, you fool, someone might hear you!

It took a while, but the house did come down.  Now we re seeing the same kind of hype machine con game with broadband.  What you don t hear them talking about is that over 94% of the world (including the US) has no access to broadband options and won t for a long time, that broadband companies are going out of business (especially DSL providers), that the more people that get broadband in the home, the worse the Internet reacts to it because of all those additional data packets being transmitted and that most of the problems with online entertainment today can be solved by simply designing products around the Internet s known limitations.

Apparently, that makes too much sense.  Or rather, it makes a certain perverted kind of sense.  When it comes to stocks, people buy on rumor and sell on results.  Thus, stock options are worth more to executives in the short term if they can create the buzz, then sell before the results can affect the price.  In case you didn t notice, a lot of people with nice stock options made money by selling out before the crash hit.  Not the average employee, of course; s/he s probably looking for a job right about now.

Another thing you don t hear these people talking about is the simple fact that the Internet is not TV and there is no reason to think that anyone willing to buy content wants it to be.  Certainly gamers don t; gaming is participatory, watching TV is passive observation.  Gamers want to participate, not watch.  It s that simple.

So instead of treating broadband like a business model that will automatically confer riches upon the unworthy but clever businessperson, the winners in broadband gaming will be those who use it to increase the options for participation, not observation.  If you want an example or two of participation versus observation, just look at the fanatically loyal communities that spring up around MM/PW games that *aren t even available yet*.

Sounds simple enough, right?  It probably makes too much sense.

- Massively multiplayer, persistent worlds will continue to be the money-maker in online games for at least four years.

The largest sites around can still make money with banner ads, but everyone else is going to have to have compelling subscription content to survive.  Right now, the best kind of subscription content is that which offers persona growth, ownership of items, houses, etc. over a period of time, and offers multiple means for participating with others.  That means a persistent world of some kind.

You can take it from there.

- Wireless gaming is going to be big  six or seven years from now.

Wireless is the other big buzz-a-roo market today, with many entrants to the field, but it is nowhere near ready for prime time.  Heck, the developers and device makers can t even agree on standards.  Expect plenty of short-term failures and good long-term growth.

In fact, I expect that eventually wireless gaming will be at least an order of magnitude more profitable than PC online gaming (and consoles, when they take off).  Before that happens, wireless devices have to accomplish at least two things: some interface and coding standards, and bigger and more capable display screens and input methods.

Once it does happen, wireless will be massive.  PC online gaming won t go away and will, in fact, continue to grow, but wireless will be King someday.  However, I expect that someday to be at least six years from now.  That s about how long it will take the manufacturers to get the better devices on the market and for enough of them to be purchased to make a difference.

- *Shadowbane* will survive.

*Shadowbane* was a self-funded effort at the start.  Losing Take Two as a publisher is a set-back for them, not a killer.  As long as they are within a year of launching, I expect them to go live in some way, shape or form.

How well the game will do, subscription-wise  well, **my opinion on that** (http://www.happypuppy.com/features/bth/bth%2Dvol9%2D23.html) is well-known.  Which is no doubt why the fanatically loyal, haven t-yet-played *Shadowbane* fanbase ( I m not a *Shadowbane* character, but I play one on the Web ) would love to nail me to a board and parade me through town as an example to others.  They keep confusing  market analysis and opinion with  she hates us, she does!

So let me **set the record straight** *again* (http://www.happypuppy.com/features/bth/bth%2Dvol9%2D27.html):  I don t hate *Shadowbane* and I don t hate Wolfpack.  In fact, I rather admire their will to succeed and I wish they would, if only to grow the industry.  I just happen to think they ve chosen the hardest, rudest, least forgiving, problem-filled niche in MMOGs to make a run at and therefore the chances of Shadowbane being a runaway hit aren t good.

And Wolfpack may love their fanatics now for the way they help create buzz about the game, but just wait.  The first time Wolfpack doesn t come through, for any reason, they can expect the vocal ferals among the base to toss them some **love notes of their very own** (http://www.happypuppy.com/features/bth/bth%2Dvol9%2D27.html).

I ve stated before in public and I do so again; if I m wrong and the game *is* a hit (meaning at least 100,000 confirmed, *paying* subscribers), I ll eat crow publicly.  If I don t resurrect BTH

somewhere else, no doubt Wolfpack will give me space on their Web site to abase myself on the Altar of Flagellation, as I munch unseasoned fowl.

- A final loose end:

I never did get around to looking at ***Atriarch* by WorldFusion** (http://www.atriarch.com/news/news.html); there was just too much time spent on the road between last October and today and I was never able to free up the time to go to their offices, as I had planned.  I wish I had taken the time, because I certainly like the way head honcha Serafina talks about the industry, the players and the *Atriarch* game design.  Without having seen the game or played it in its current state, I can only say; the right attitude is there.

And so we re done, for now.  At some point, Happy Puppy will want me to quit sucking their server resources through the bth@happypuppy.com address, so if you need to reach me, do so at jessica@mm3d.com.

Don t be strangers now,  y hear?

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