

From chip Fri Sep 18 13:12:58 1987

Subject: Greg P

Did you see my Stratus mail message from last night?

It is clear that Greg is seriously disturbed here. Someone online last night (I think it may have been Becky) said that he had some upset in his personal life that had him really down. Frankly, I'm concerned.

Somehow we need to communicate the following points, not just to Greg, although he seems to be the one who needs it most. In order from least important to most important:

1) The major areas of social contact in the world, namely the cities, consist of regions that are both weapons-free and theft-free. The most gross abuses of civilized behavior are therefor eminently avoidable for those who wish to avoid them.

2) This is not reality. This is fantasy. This is a game. Don't lose sight of the idea that the purpose of this place is entertainment. What happens here has little if any bearing on the real world. If one Avatar steals from another, the real-world impact is nil. (It is legitimate to raise the question of what lesson we are teaching, but that is another issue which I believe is covered by the remaining points).

3) I believe in the old idea (common in a lot of Christian thinking) that there is no life without at least the potential for death. In order for existence to be meaningful there needs to be a state of non-existence to contrast it to. Note that "death" in Habitat is a transitory thing and does not really reflect ultimate obliteration in the way that death in the real world does. It does, however, give one cause to value one's person and property. Similarly, a piece of property only has value by virtue of the degree to which it is distinguishable from other pieces of property. Once you have any concept of value, there exists the potential for unethical usurpation of the basis of that value. While we can prevent certain specific infractions (i.e., taking something out of someone else's hands), ultimately there is no way to guard against this. On the other hand, if there was no concept of value, the world would be homogeneous and therefor uninteresting.

4) The very notions of morality and ethics are human concepts. Consider, for a moment, what sort of world we would live in if there was a god that enforced moral standards as natural law. The very idea of right and wrong would not exist in such a universe. Why, then, should people appeal to such a god in Habitat? Because (a) they think it is possible, and (b) they have brought their notions of good and evil with them from the external world. However, the Oracle fundamentally cannot enforce moral codes, even if we could all agree on what code should be the standard, which we cannot. The moral standards must therefor be chosen and enforced by the community itself. Instead of appealing to the Oracle to be the magical omnipotent lawgiver, policeman and judge, people should join together to form a society which is able to establish its own standards of conduct. Since Avatars can effect each another in numerous ways, of which "killing" is but one among many, communities of Avatars can enforce their standards with various sanctions, just as people do in the real world. We encourage everyone to do this, and are interested in suggestions for ways the system can support this process (e.g., the "gate" object). I would also advocate that there should always be some "lawless" territories, both to provide contrast and so that there is a place for the inevitable misfits to go.

By the way, isn't Greg P the one who wanted to start the church? Perhaps we

can encourage him to be the nucleus around which a community can form. He doesn't have to be the leader, but by promoting a doctrine of tolerance and gentleness he can certainly help push things in the right direction.