Virtual worlds have exploded out of online game culture and now capture the attention of millions of ordinary people: husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, workers, retirees. Devoting dozens of hours each week to massively multiplayer virtual reality environments (like World of Warcraft and Second Life), these millions are the start of an exodus into the refuge of fantasy, where they experience life under a new social, political, and economic order built around fun. Given the choice between a fantasy world and the real world, how many of us would choose reality? Exodus to the Virtual World explains the growing migration into virtual reality, and how it will change the way we live—both in fantasy worlds and in the real one.
if your interest relates more to open-ended worlds, such as Second Life, that are used
virtual worlds; eventually the real world must become more fun. Exodus, though it has
that we will at any one time be in either the virtual world or the real world and not both
happen within virtual worlds when more of us spend more time in them (e.g., How will
always come back to the real world for the goods that only it can provide (Castronova
world does not, why/how does it follow that the real world must aspire to be more fun,
more time in virtual worlds, they will come to expect the real world to provide many of
refers to "Virtual Worlds" most of the lessons relate specifically to game-based virtual
example, two general themes that cut through a lot of the lessons are the importance
broadly: I go to the gym to work out; I go to the library to study. I don't complain that I
social effects are felt here in the real world. He suggests that as more people spend
synthetic worlds for fun, but still come back to the real world for other activities, even
sell virtual real estate. I hop into the real world to go for a run, eat lunch, take a nap,
Worlds. And, as in SW, Castronova is at is strongest in Exodus when he explains the
kiss my spouse. Why should I expect to be able to do any of these things in the other
worlds? I hop into WoW to partake of the "good vs. evil" shared lore. I hop into SL to
example of what I'm talking about here). Now, maybe some day in the future it really
same problem in his argument. He thinks synthetic worlds provide the highest utility,
worlds? Once it's established that the synthetic worlds provide fun, and that the real
beyond games versus more multi-faceted worlds distinction made previously -
part from the games versus more multi-faceted worlds distinction made previously -
and political implications since so many more of our interactions will involve people
social policies inspired by game
digital games that could be applied to real life. The author
doesn't seem to have any expectation that they will be applied exactly as described
through development of digital games that could be applied to real life. The author
thought we could only experience in the real world: eating a cheeseburger, having
This, he theorizes, will lead to a conflict over attention between the real and the
enviroments which have clearly defined goals, roles, rules, rewards, etc. Therefore,
interacting within virtual environments will change our expectations for interactions
outside of games. So if the book had been called something like "Real Life Lessons
influence their expectations for how things should work back in the "real world"
metaphor is, and Castronova admits this himself, that the synthetic migration isn't
Eventually, after hearing how great New is over and again, those that stayed put in
from Digital Games," it would have delivered well on the expectations set by the
gettings to the substantial points. When it finally does, it is shallow in its descriptions
get to the "realness" of virtual worlds. The main thesis of Exodus is that because synthetic
biggest flaw (among the several I found in the book) is
plays baseball when I want to hit home runs; I play football when I want to score
different goods to be achieved in different worlds, so people will

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The author frequently suggests that game designers may be better-equipped than most to handle the social policy issues of the 21st century and beyond. As a game designer, I found this rather gratifying, though I remain skeptical whether it's actually true. However, the parallels he draws between social policy design and virtual world design are compelling, and many of the mechanics we find today in virtual worlds and MMOs are in fact elegant solutions to social issues that have yet to even be well-addressed in the real world.

This book is primarily a speculative, futurist work. Many of the author's claims go largely unsubstantiated precisely for that reason: they're speculations into one possible future. I had no problem with this, and the author makes it clear up front what type of book this is. You just have to come into it with the right mindset. That said, he does frequently reference verifiable present-day facts in order to establish trends which inform his projections, making them more educated predictions than wild guesses.

My only major complaint with the book is that, as the author has extrapolated the present state of virtual worlds and MMOs into a vision of future society, he's undertaken significant cognitive effort to evolve the social side of things, and spent almost no effort on the evolution of the virtual worlds and MMOs themselves. In effect, there seems to be an unstated assumption throughout the book that the design of virtual worlds and MMOs will remain largely static, and that the only variable will be the percentage of the population participating in them. But if the relatively brief history of video games shows us anything, it's that we can expect meteoric paradigm shifts in games around every 5-10 years. Relevant examples include the introduction of the first text-based MUD, the first graphical MUD, and the original Everquest. Why should we not expect similar paradigm shifts to dramatically alter the landscape of virtual worlds and MMOs in the next 5, 10, 20, even 50 years? And of course, these paradigm shifts will affect how users participate in those worlds, which will in turn affect their expectations of the real world in accordance with the author's theory.

Nevertheless, Exodus to the Virtual World comes well-recommended. It's a thought-provoking read for game designers and players alike, and I'm willing to bet some politicians could learn a thing or two from it as well. ;)

In his book, Edward Castronova depicts a memorable image of a future in which participation in virtual worlds across all age groups and social levels is a normal part of everyday life. For any who wish to understand the virtual world, this is a major insight. From a gamer perspective, despite the first hand experience, this book highlighted many details that I...