30 Days in ActiveWorlds – Community, Design and Terrorism in a Virtual World.

Dr Andrew Hudson-Smith

1.0 Introduction

The idea behind '30 Days in ActiveWorlds' was to fully document the development of a virtual environment from beginning to end, as a plot of virgin virtual land which, it was hoped, would develop into a community and a fully-fledged new virtual world. The aim was not to create a dialogue of life in the virtual environment, such as the well-documented "My Tiny Life" by Julian Dibbell [1] or "The Cybergypsies" by Indra Sinha [2], yet the events that unfolded over the 30 Day period led to just such a documentation, and with it my conclusions about not only community and design in a virtual environment, but also views on the increasingly blurred boundaries between what is real and what is virtual.

The title '30 Days in ActiveWorlds' stems from the free trial software of the Active Worlds server (AW), which allows users to host their own world. The trial software operates for 30 days before timing out, enabling users to set up and run their own worlds and small communities before having to purchase a full server from AW. AW is a commercial multi-user system operating on a standard Windows-based system with a modem connection. Distributed and run from north of Boston, the AW Universe currently consists of over 700 worlds with an average of 400 users at any one time logged in. Users, or citizens, as they are known, appear as avatars. Avatars are the citizen's graphical icon in the AW system, and the choice of avatars range from a large male biker called 'Butch' to the petite female of 'Tanya' - with many incarnations in-between. My chosen avatar in the Universe was 'Butch', the alter ego of 'Smithee (my name in AW). My choice of 'Butch' is not a reflection on my own real world appearance, heaven forbid! Nevertheless, it is the one that I normally adopted. I had trawled the then 423 worlds that made up the AW Universe for the previous 6 months as part of my

research at University College London into placing three-dimensional models of the urban environments on the web. Jumping in and out of these various virtual worlds I was struck by the diversity of environments that make's up the AW Universe. Worlds range from the very social environment of 'Friends' to the more desolate frontier atmosphere apparent in 'Mars'. Each of these worlds has its own characteristics and user base. Jumping in and out of these worlds allowed me to meet a number of regulars in the AW Universe, citizens that I would subsequently involve in the shaping of my own world.

The research, under the banner of 'Online Planning', was aimed at opening up the possibilities of placing an urban planning system online within a shared virtual environment, allowing citizen participation, online democracy and other similar utopian ideals. It is this research that led me to download my own AW world, which I duly placed on an available Windows 95 machine in the corner of the office in London.

The idea of using my downloaded world to allow users a free reign to build, say or do whatever they desired in the virtual environment came in the middle of a telephone call from a journalist called Tony Durham. Tony rang from the Times Higher Education Supplement asking what I was up to, having read about my research in a previous month's Sunday Telegraph Magazine. As a researcher I was obviously keen to get my work as much exposure as possible, and the fact that the Times Higher Education Supplement rang up was a great opportunity. Thus was born, in the middle of a conversation, the idea of opening up my server to the world and letting people build, say and basically do what ever they want, all in the name of 'research'. Everything that took place in the world would be logged, allowing us to see what was built when, said by whom and at what time. Essentially, it would allow me to log the development of a virtual world and community from day one, in high detail until its closure on day 30. Everything was set to go live on November 30th, 1998, with the Times Higher Education Supplement running a small article on it the following week, to announce its opening.

The world was set up on my Windows machine, entitled the 'Collaborative Virtual Design Studio' or 'CVDS' for short. It was the first world to log both building and conversation in a virtual environment and tied in well with my previous research. On entering this new world, all users would be greeted with an infinite space of virgin green land which meets a blue horizon above a mountain range. I set about putting up welcoming signs and an entry space at Ground Zero in CVDS, so called as its at 0 North, 0 West on the AW co-ordinate system. I had previously contacted AW and informed them of my research, and they were keen to help and extended my world out to 69N 69W (the normal free world only extends to 25N 25W). This gave me a world approximately the size of Soho in London in which I needed to place a range of objects that the users could build with.

The main feature of AW is that users can claim land and build (for a full description of how building takes place, and the typical patterns, see Schroeder et

al [3]). Building is carried out using a selection of predefined objects from windows, doors and walls to trees, shrubs and paving tiles. These objects can be cloned and placed on virtual land to create what is essentially a large virtual 'Lego' set. To aid users in my world, a builder's yard was set up, located 69N, 69W, in which 368 objects were laid out, ready to be selected and cloned to start off the building process. I was helped with the layout of the builder's yard by two citizens I had met before in AW, Princess Tia and Dawny. Princess Tia and Dawny floated 50 meters above the builder's yard and painstakingly cloned and placed each object in position, ready for the public opening. While they were in the virtual world I returned to the real world to set up a web page to introduce the project and hooked up our web-cam to stream live pictures of myself and the office into Ground Zero for the opening.

CVDS was, as far as I am aware, the first world to open up without any guidelines or laws. The aim was to see what people would build if they were allowed to build anything they wanted. Other worlds in the AW Universe have strict guidelines on what can by built, where and by whom. Systems can also be put in place to filter out certain words or phases, resulting in ejection if guidelines are breached. Dodge and Kitchen [4] view AW as being more akin to a theme park with entry as long as you comply with the various restrictions. As a test of my world, and its open build philosophy, I left the server open to the world overnight, two days before the launch. Upon arriving at work and logging into the world I was greeted with two large signs, placed by an anonymous user. The first sign had an image linked in from a sex orientated web site, and the second sign was text linking the image with my mother. With the world set to go live on a University server and the work being covered by the Times Higher Education Supplement I hoped this wasn't a sign of things to come!

2.0 First Steps

The space that makes up the AW Universe is sparsely populated with an on average of 0.5 users per world. To get a world noticed and populated, there needs to be a 'hook'. There is no point in launching a world if no one comes to build, which unfortunately seems to be the case in most areas within the AW Universe. There is a saying on the web, that 'if you build it they will come' (taken from the film 'Field of Dreams'). But in virtual worlds this is not necessarily true, especially if you haven't built the world but want them to build it for you. I decided that a building competition was the way to go, and a prize of one year's free citizenship to AW was on offer for the best design in the world after 30 days. The fact that the prize was a citizenship opened up the world for 'tourists' to build. Tourists are users of AW that haven't paid their $19.95 annual fee to become a citizen. This leaves them as something of a 2nd class citizen, indeed many worlds ban them altogether, and even where they are allowed to build, their buildings would not be guaranteed to remain intact. Actively encouraging tourists into my world allowed them to compete for citizenship status, safe in the knowledge that my world was

logged, and therefore backed up every night in case of any crime or vandalism. It also aimed to achieve a level of integration, to change the social dynamic, which exists in other worlds, by giving tourists equal status. Equal status was achieved to a certain extent, in that I allowed both tourists and citizens equal rights in where to build, but some aspects of segregation were 'hard coded' into the software. Tourists, for example, are limited to the choice of two avatars in the world, compared to the normal choice of over 20. This instantly makes them recognisable; the normal 'tourist' avatar is a male or female avatar with a camera round their necks with sunglasses on and a typical 'tourist' appearance. To get around this I designed two avatars, which would blend more into the overall environment. Losing the cameras around the neck and giving them more of a standard appearance the tourists in CVDS were able to blend more into the environment.

The launch of the project consisted of Princess Tia and myself standing around at ground zero, looking up at the web-cam that was plugged in, having a streamed video image of myself, which was displayed at 50 feet above the central region. An advert was placed by AW in AlphaWorld, the most popular of the worlds in the universe, and various messages were spammed across newsgroups. Princess Tia acted as a meeter and greeter, showing users around and letting them know that they could build whatever they wanted in the world. An automatic message also warned them that all conversation and building was logged. Dawny logged in from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA around 2pm Greenwich Mean Time and decided to act as a tourist representative from the world. She went out around the other worlds actively recruiting users to come into CVDS and start building. This began to give the project the momentum it needed, and more importantly started the word of mouth that would eventually create the complex social world in the Windows 95 box in the corner of my office.

As part of the website, a daily news section was set up to document the major events in the world. This site also provided images of the buildings constructed on each day and displayed a map of the world so far. On Day 1 36 registered citizens and an unknown number of tourists placed a total of 6430 objects in the world. The number of tourists is unknown as they only count as 'one' on the builders' list that was used to map the world every 24 hours, but my impression was that there were 2 times the number of tourists as there were citizens, a ratio that increased as word got out that CVDS was offering the prize of a free citizenship. The amount of growth was surprising from the point of view that most worlds are sparsely populated; CVDS had overnight become the third most popular world in the AW Universe. It also provided interesting items on the news page and introduced users (or avatars) that would become regular faces over the course of the next 29 days.

3.0 Virtual Terrorism

The first few days of growth went well and the research was generating interest from various branches of the media. On Day 2 BBC Radio 3 dropped into Betty B's house, located west of Ground Zero. Betty, logging in from Amsterdam, had built up a house based on the ideas of cubist design. Although the interior was still basic, it had a path with an American style mail box (linked to her hotmail account) and the beginnings of a well planted garden. A technology journalist from the Press Association in the United Kingdom, Lawrence, known as Lorca in CVDS, also joined the world to write about the launch, and about how a new community was being built in cyberspace. With a deadline to meet, an interview was carried out in Ground Zero and he was introduced to Dawny, Princess Tia and Betty B. Despite a tight deadline Lorca stayed in the world during the day and even remained after work when the office closed down. This was an indication of things to come, as a number of us would spend almost every waking hour in the world - building, talking and generally exploring what was possible for the duration of the project.

On Day 4, on logging in, I was greeted with 25 email messages and a stream of ICQs (a telegram message system) complaining that there was a user in the world knocking down buildings and placing thousands of objects. This (at that time unknown) user was running riot in the world, placing numerous objects and looking as if he intended to overload the world server. He did a good job since, when I arrived at work, the server came to a halt and the world went offline. By examining the log files, I noticed that a single user had been logging on and off during the night and, during a period of over 5 hours, had placed over 85,000 objects in the world. The objects had been placed using automatic building software called 'hambot', which had been banned in some regions of the AW Universe, but not in mine as users could say and build what ever they wanted. My world was a world without laws, and if a user wanted to place 85,000 objects they were allowed to do so. However, because it had crashed the main server and thus essentially ended the 30 Days project, we decided that the objects that had been placed would be cleared up, and the community would be put to a vote to see if they wanted laws put into place to protect the world. By the fourth day, the community was therefore about to set up its own police department, complete with call boxes and regular patrols.

The 85,0000 objects were mapped for the news page and then cleared so the world could go back online. Within a minute of the world going back online, users were coming in and surveying the damage. Houses built by tourists had been ripped apart and a trail of damage lay across the world, as if hit by an earthquake. A group gathered around Ground Zero and began to question what sort of person would do such a thing. Betty B mentioned that as the world was being logged, perhaps this was being done on purpose to see what the population's reaction would be. Suddenly I became suspect number one! Although this was a virtual world, I realised that it was still possible to feel uncomfortable. As the group of avatars gathered around me, accusations came thick and fast. I managed to talk the users around to seeing my point of view - that it would have been pointless to vandalise my own world. Nevertheless, the seed of doubt had been sown. On the plus side,

the vandalism occurred when Lorca was in the world, so it made copy in the Press Association, TescoNet and Excite, which brought further interest in the project.

Once restarted, the world remained on an even keel until Day 9 when a tourist going under the name of Jero logged into the world. Jero attracted the attention of Betty B, who was by then a core member of the community. Jero was asking questions about the vandalism incident from Day 4 and it became evident from the nature of Jero's conversation that he had been involved in the incident. Betty B sent me an ICQ message and I logged into the world. When I met Jero, he divulged that he was the High Commander of the AW Terrorist Group, and although he had not undertaken the vandalism himself, he had issued orders for it to occur. Jero then issued a series of threats that he would hack into the main server hosting 30 Days in AW and shut the world down. I sent a message to all the known users in the world that the world was on 'Def Con One' (a military alert) status with a new attack imminent. A group gathered at Ground Zero, looking towards the skyline and waiting to see what would happen.

While Jero was logged on, a trace was carried out on his IP number (his internet address identifier) and AW.com informed of the threat. This was mainly to ensure that the main world server couldn't be hacked - as this would have jeopardised our local network at University College London, which I was not keen on. As a result of the IP trace, AW.com contacted the Internet Service Provider (ISP) of Jero and obtained a contact number for the user's account. The information was provided by the ISP due to a number of complaints that AW.com had had in relation to several reoccurring IP numbers. Apparently the AW Terrorist Group had been quite active in the proceeding months. AW contacted Jero, or to be more precise, Jero's father, in Vancouver, Canada. Legal action was threatened and Jero, a 15-year-old teenager logged in from his bedroom, had his computer taken away from him. The computer was not removed from Jero however before he could issue one final threat. Jero logged into CVDS for one last time on Day 11. He teleported to my location and issued the threat that I had upset the wrong person, and the group would be taking imminent action against me. Knowing he posed no serious threat, I ejected him from the world and thought that that would be the last I saw of him. Within half an hour I had lost all Internet access from my personal machine at University College London. The world remained online, but I couldn't even pick up my email. I remained unable to connect for over 6 hours while my Internet connection was restored - a hacker had entered my machine via my own personal web server and disabled all my network card settings!

4.0 Virtual Coffee – Community in 30 Days

Community is central to the development of all virtual worlds, whether they are purely text-based systems such as LamdaMOO or three-dimensional virtual worlds like AW. A system will either thrive or decline according to the size and

enthusiasm of its community - and 30 Days in AW was no exception. By the 3rd day a group of 8-10 users were becoming regular builders in the world.

Figure 1. Group of avatars at Ground Zero of '30 Days in AW'.

Figure 1 shows a group of the users participating in '30 Days'. The photograph was captured on the final day of building, by which time a core community was firmly in place. The names on the image are difficult to decipher but the users, as in real life, can be identified from their appearance alone. Dawny adopted the 'Tanya' avatar with long flowing red hair and the rather 1970s green dress. Betty B on the other hand chose the 'Rachel' avatar with blonde hair tied in a ponytail. Lorca always logged in as 'James' and Stick chose 'Hotep', walking around the world in his Egyptian outfit. The users had over 20 avatars to chose from and each person adopted a certain look, essentially recreating their own identity in the virtual world. In more populated worlds the restricted choice of avatars limits the ability to choose an avatar that represents one's identity, but in '30 Days', with its 8-10 core users, we could each have our own look. Nevertheless, the limited range of avatars can be restricting compared to text based virtual worlds. For example, in LamdaMoo users create their own identity through textual expression, allowing each to create their own unique personality in the environment. '30 Days' allowed the avatars to become associated with each person and in a sense each avatar began to resemble a friendly face when entering the world, or walking in on one of the social gatherings that took place. The exception to each person's use of a fixed avatar was National Butch Day, organised by Stick. Stick organised the day via a

series of email and telegrams informing users that they were required to adopt the Butch Avatar for the duration of day 20. Butch was selected because he was my chosen avatar identity in the world. I was blissfully unaware of the nature of the day until I logged in as usual and found a group of users around Ground Zero all looking like me with the Butch avatar! My initial confusion, not having recognisable faces to identify, was greeted with much amusement and provided the opportunity for numerous Smithee impersonations by the members of the community.

Such incidents underline the sense of community that developed in '30 Days'. As with many descriptions of virtual worlds, the reader often gets the impression that they really had to be there to appreciate the sense of involvement. 'Being There' essentially sums up the feeling of community involvement and excitement in the world. It was a feeling of being involved in something that had the potential to become part of the history of the development of virtual worlds and of community. A frontier attitude developed, one of shaping new worlds and seeing what we could do. Logging into the world started to feel like arriving home. I would leave my small flat in North London every day, catch the tube to Kings Cross Station, arrive at work, and log in. As my avatar appeared at Ground Zero I would be greeted by upwards of 8 users already logged in. Each of these individuals would bid me good morning, afternoon or evening, according to their real world location, and we would embark on the daily ritual of looking at the new buildings and putting the world to rights over virtual coffee.

This feeling of being home continued over the Christmas period. A Christmas tree was planted at Ground Zero, decorated with flashing lights and surrounded by presents. Shortly after my real world Christmas lunch I sneaked away and logged into my laptop that was set up at my parents' house in the country. Surprisingly, I found a couple of users logged in and we decided to hold an impromptu carol service around the Christmas tree. We all gathered around and linked in some Midi-based music to the world, allowing us to hear the carols. First up was Oh Come All Ye Faithful, which we subsequently sung - or rather, typed. My family, upon finding me logged on and typing Christmas Carols, were somewhat concerned. Why, rather than watching the traditional Queen's Speech, was I logged into a virtual world with virtual carols and virtual presents? They may have had a point.

The webcam, which had been streaming pictures both of me and of the machine that the world was running on, was constantly on, and after a while I tended not to notice that it was there at all. It was, however, noticed by the members of the world, and as soon as the second day, screengrabs from my webcam were appearing around the world. In one incident the live webcam was copied onto four sides of a cube and placed on top of a column looking over the world. Around the column were images of avatars with their hands raised to my image in praise. It gave the webcam an almost god-like appearance with the images of me looking out over the world that I had set up. Over the coming weeks the webcam became a focus for certain members of the community. One member, whom I will call James

for anonymity's sake, logged in on the 12th day and asked me to come and look at the new home he had built. Such requests were normal as buildings were central to the nature of the world, but I wasn't prepared for what would greet me when I walked into his house.

Upon walking into his lounge, all I could see were pictures of myself pasted onto the walls. The pictures had been grabbed from the webcam and placed on an outside web server to hotlink back into the world. They were grabs of me which showed my normal office routine and as such, at least in my view, weren't too interesting. A couple of them showed me with a cup of coffee, one with a chocolate bar and a few while I sat and ate my lunch. Each of these images had captions attached, such as 'Smithee loves coffee' or, in the case of an image of my empty chair, 'Where is our leader?. When James asked for my views on his new house I was lost for words. The question that entered my mind was: why? It then dawned on me that while I was looking at the house and at the images of myself in the virtual world, I was also being watched live on the web-cam. James asked why I looked shocked, to which I replied blaming an email I had been reading - and not the fact the he had images of my real world self all over his lounge wall.

After finding the images in James's lounge, I began to have the feeling of being watched. Thus I decided to temporarily take the webcam offline for a couple of days, with the blank screens on the web-cam blamed on a technical error. While I was out of the office, my colleague took a phone call from James, who asked him to reconnect the webcam without telling me so I could be watched when I came back into the office. My colleague refused and told me what had happened on my return. I suddenly realised that I had inadvertently opened myself up completely to the online world. My telephone number and location was on our main research website and images of me were beamed live into the world. Although the intention was to ground the research and give it a human face, I felt that a line had been crossed between the virtual world that I had set up and the real world in which I worked.

I logged into the world and confronted James, who had by then informed other members of the world that he had phoned my office. I stated my reservations about his behaviour and that in my view, virtual is virtual and real is real. The members of the community didn't seem to share my concern, yet I somehow felt that a line had been crossed and the webcam had become something that was distracting from the purpose of the world rather than aiding it. The web-cam remains offline to this day, although images grabbed from it can still be seen in the world.

5.0 Spatial Development

The only sections of the world that I personally created in '30 Days' were Ground Zero and the Builders Yard. By the end of Day 30, 27699 objects made up the world, placed by 49 registered users and an unknown number of tourists.
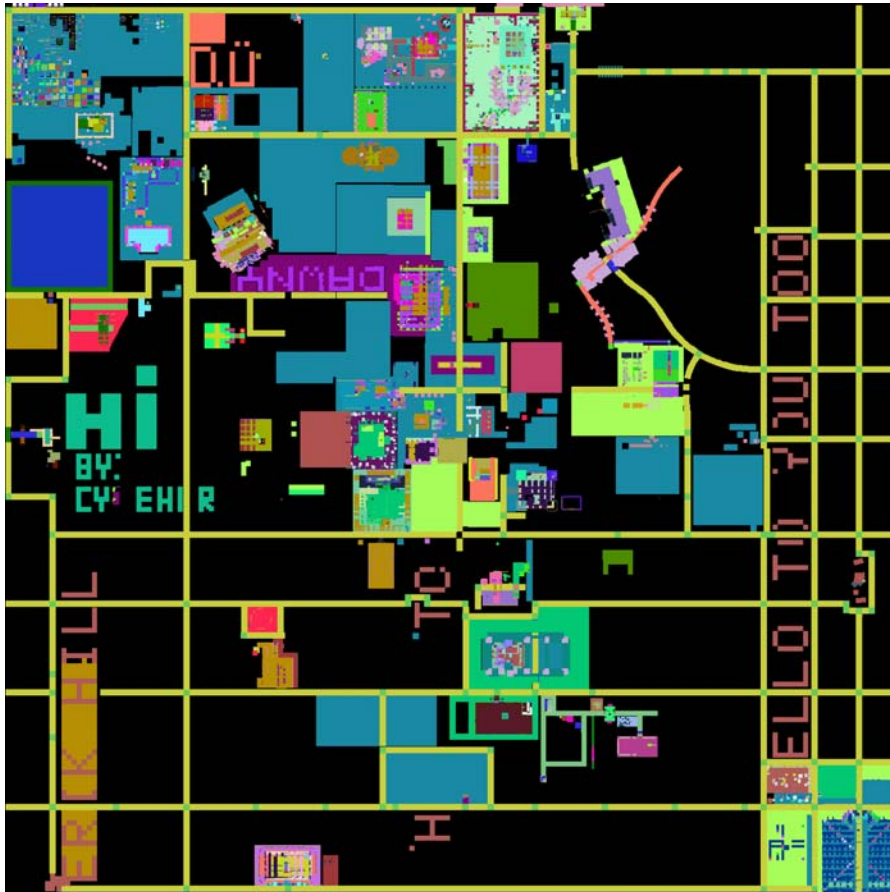
Figure 2. Map of the final days building in '30 Days in AW'

Figure 2 illustrates the final map of the world, with its buildings and infrastructure clearly visible. The world consisted of a number of houses, nightclubs, museums, bars, health centres and even a lover's lane, complete with an adjacent motel. The majority of the structures mirrored reality, or rather a utopian view of reality. The world consists of a number of country cottages with long tree-lined paths leading to a rustic front door and into an open space with a roaring open fire. Wooden American style lodges are also prevalent, standing side by side with skyscrapers made out of glass and floating castles. The placement of American style log cabins harks back to the initial building when the AW Universe first opened. As

Schroeder et al [3] state the early buildings in Activeworlds were like log cabins, owing more to the television series 'Little House of the Prairie' than to imagined 'cyberspace' and '30 Days' seemed to be mirroring this frontier philosophy.

The majority of these structures have doorways, windows, and flights of stairs or escalators. Yet in the virtual world there is no need for doorways or stairs as avatars can walk through walls and fly up to reach new floors. Indeed, the navigation system of AW makes the climbing of flights of stairs notoriously difficult with the avatar often getting stuck and being forced to fly. Stairs, doors, and chairs (avatars are unable to sit) are all part of the standard set of objects, and this has a direct influence on the structures built in the world.

 AW can be seen as a huge construction set with a set number of objects. In addition to the nature of the objects, there is the widespread inclination of users to create structures that mirror the real world as much as possible - given the constraints of the system. An example of this is the Dark Night Bar. The bar has a gent's toilet, complete with urinals, washbasins and a mirror. None of the objects are there for obvious or functional reasons, but they add to the level of immersion in the world. Similarly, there is the grid-pattern road layout that criss-crosses the world. The road network developed between the 6th and 10th day, aimed at influencing the development of the world and extending its development along the newly placed highways. This was a highly labour intensive exercise, especially when one considers that there are no cars or vehicles in AW. Part of the reason for the construction was that people knew that the world was mapped every 24 hours, with a new image placed on the website's news page. The prospect of seeing one's creations mapped led to a spate of incidents known as satellite writing (see figure 2). Satellite writing is text that, although it is indistinguishable from the ground, it appears when the world is mapped from above, in the manner that the Nazca Lines in the Peruvian Desert are only discernible from the air. Mapping the world each night was like taking a satellite view of the world as it developed, and thus revealed structures that could not be seen from the ground. The first words to appear were 'Hi' on Day 6. By day 7, the words 'By Cyberhar' had been added. Cyberhar was also the architect of the CyberHar Castle and an Alien made out of coloured glass in the northern reaches of the world.

All of these structures have been lone creations. Lover's Lane was the only creation in the world that engaged the whole community. Lover's Lane was set up by Dawny and her real life partner Ken as a romantic area of the world where love poems, and more importantly photographs of partners, could be posted. With input from the community, this transformed into an area where pictures of persons generally (not just romantic partners) were displayed, and it provided a focal point for members of the '30 Days' community to find out about each other. The photos even extended to images of people's pets, family and friends, essentially giving the world a human face.

Lover's Lane was a section of the world built by the community for the community, whereas Stick was working on his own building project for the benefit

of an external community. Stick's Community Church was built specifically for the purpose of prayer in '30 Days'. The Church resembles a Victorian style English Christian Church, complete with bell tower, stained glass windows and a church organ. Although built in '30 Days', it wasn't aimed at the internal community. Instead, it was built for the youth section of the Alpha Church, based in Brompton, London, and specifically for the Sunday School section. The churches name 'Alpha' and it closeness to Alpha World was purely coincidental, but allowed it to fit seamlessly in the AW Universe. It was actively used for meetings, and represents the only structure in the world that served a purpose outside of the virtual environment. It is worthy of note that although it may seem that a church in '30 Days' could not portray any of the features of a real world church service it is a sign that the community was coming of age. Virtual churches are a factor in many virtual world communities and as a service they tend to appear when the community has matured. Schroeder [5], in a study of virtual religion, notes that a prayer meeting in a virtual world may not provide the same type of religious experience as a conventional church service, but it certainly reproduces some of the essential features of the latter – albeit in novel ways. While I wasn't present at any of the services held in '30 Days' it was somehow reassuring that some sections of the world were used for such purposes.

6.0 '30 Days II' and beyond

From the outset the fate of the world after the '30 Days' was clearly stated on the web page: it was in the path of an incoming asteroid and would be destroyed. This linked back to events in the first ActiveWorld, AlphaWorld, which was similarly wiped out in a cataclysmic event. In reality of course, all that would happen would be that the server next to my desk would be reset and the world utilised for other research. However, towards the end of '30 Days', members of the community made it clear that they wanted the world and its community left intact. Due to its success in gaining media attention, AW.com granted a free one year's licence for the world which enabled the world to be kept running. This extension of the world was marked by the launch of 30Days II, in which it was planned that - rather than using the existing object set - users could build their own objects and import them into the world. A web site was created and linked to various 3D software packages and information on making objects for AW, a task that is by no means easy. A new prize was placed on offer, a CD-Rom version of AW (value $50), which allowed high-resolution textures, and the world would continue to be mapped and logged.

Only four objects were submitted: a Condom Machine (to be placed by Lover's Lane), a Moon, a Park Bench and a Carousel. The low number of objects illustrates the difficulty in making custom objects. The majority of users continued to build with the standard object set from the Builder's Yard. Mid-way through 30 Days II, I started a new contract at work, and although I still mapped the world, I was not able to log in eight hours a day as I had done during the previous 30 Days. The number of users of the world began to decline and eventually the world was only

populated by 2-3 users at its peak. The world therefore became another empty world in the AW Universe and began to resemble a ghost town, a feeling that is present in the many areas of AW. The 'ghost town' effect may be seen as a symptom of the frontier philosophy in AW. Population levels in newly created worlds tend to be higher as people are attracted by the ability to take part in a new project. Once a world has grown and land has been claimed people often move on in search of the next virgin plot to build on, leaving behind them a virtual ghost town. '30 Days' saw rapid growth, initially in the physical structure of the world and then in its community. Once the users had built their houses, nightclubs, or whatever took their fancy, the world increasingly became used for socializing and the rate of building declined. The world's 'hook' was that it would be logged and mapped for 30 Days with a prize at the end, and despite the community's initial intentions to keep things running, the members moved elsewhere. Some of them moved onto other multi-user systems, such as the Everquest role-playing game by Verant Interactive, Inc. Stick continued to use the Church for a year before his membership in AW expired. Lorca caught up on all the work he had missed while being drawn into the experiment. Dawny and Ken decided to get married in the world, which was set to be the first '30 Days' reunion with Stick acting as the Virtual Vicar. Unfortunately Dawny and Ken split up and the wedding never took place. Dawny recently got back in contact to let me know that Ken had died of a heart attack and asked to re-enter CVDS so she could see what he built in Lover's Lane. It now stands a memorial to his work in the world. Other users set up their own worlds in the AW Universe and the central region of CVDS was cleared so that other research could take place on the server. I reflected on my 300+ hours spent in the world and decided to go back out into the real world for a while.

So what did '30 Days' achieve? It was the first fully mapped and logged world and the maps have appeared in a range of publications documenting the history of Virtual Worlds. Perhaps more importantly it allowed a community to develop -, and for a short time to thrive - all from a standard personal computer in the corner of my office.

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