Foreword

The world of tomorrow is virtual.

Cyberspace has many dimensions which cross the boundary between virtual and physical realities. Virtual worlds are rapidly emerging as an alternative means to the real world for communicating, collaborating, and organizing economic activity. In these three-dimensional worlds, individuals relate to one another through avatars, human-like digital depictions that represent real people in a simulated world. It is no longer designed as a fantasy world where inhabitants escape from the real world. Rather, the user is placed in a real social or business context, where people maintain their own identities, rather than assume new ones. In addition to setting online games and entertainment applications, virtual worlds offer a safe haven for those dealing with real-world problems. They have become an interface many companies use in various fields, including retail, client services, B2B and advertising – similar to the interface behind Google Earth that has been put to real world use. There is genuine content being generated in these virtual worlds, true interaction with actual business, life, creativity, social networking, etc. Virtual worlds are treated not as a game but as an extension of the real world. It is art imitating life.

Because virtual worlds replicate the real world, they raise new and compelling legal questions about such issues as owning virtual assets, intellectual property right infringements and liabilities. They reflect what is really going on in our own world.

Law and Order in Virtual Worlds is timely for several reasons. Whether we like it or not, virtual worlds have created a complex system of property management and serious, daunting legal challenges. The issues of rights and obligations that emanate out of the relationship between the owner and creator of a virtual world and its resident customers are growing in complexity. They pose increasingly serious challenges to our notions about the nature of property, the legal rights of players in virtual worlds and even the presumed boundary between the real and the imagined worlds: should laws from our “real” lives influence, or even be enforced in, virtual world?

This book aspires to provide understanding of the interface between the laws of the real world and the laws of the virtual worlds. The strength of this book is the depth and breadth of the information. It is a valuable guide to navigating the complex - but transcending - world where virtual laws meet real life laws.

Virtually Yours,

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Sylvia Mercado Kierkegaard (AB Mass Comm, M. Eco, LLB, MSC, MA, LLM, PHD, PG Dip. Private Law; PG Dip. EU Law, DTheo) is a Professor of Law. She is currently Visiting Professor at several universities, including Southampton University and Renmin University. She is also an International Associate of i-Laws and a PHD Supervisor-Professor at the Communications University of China. Sylvia finished her education in the US, UK, the Netherlands, Denmark and the Philippines with distinction. She is the editor-in-chief of the International Journal of Private Law, the Journal of International Commercial Law and Technology, International Journal of Liability and Scientific Enquiry; managing editor of the Journal of Legal Technology Risk Management; associate editor of International Journal of Intercultural Information Management; Associate Editor of the International Journal of Innovation in the Digital Economy; and member of the editorial board of over 20 international journals. She is also the President of the International Association of IT Lawyers and member of the Scientific Board of the European Privacy Association and EICAR. Sylvia is the Conference Organiser and Chairman of the Legal, Security and Privacy Issues Conference (LSPI), International Business Law & Technology Conference (IBLT) and the International Law and Trade Conference (ILTC). She is also an expert for the EU (e-practice, e-content & Safer Internet, e-participation, e-government and the EU-China Info Society Project on Info Security) and a regulatory expert for the Council of Europe. She is the Principal Investigator for the co-Reach project, which will conduct a comparative analysis of the copyright law between China and selected EU member states. She has published over 2000 articles and books and has won 2 journalism awards. She is also advisor to several international associations, government bodies and companies. Her main area of expertise is cyberlaw, contract law and public administration law.