

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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