Foreword

Should I be interested in virtual worlds? That is a question I am often asked. It is one that the authors of this book are also asked, as experts in the field. It is an unusual question once you start to consider it. Virtual worlds, metaverses, are an extension of how we are able to communicate with one another across distance. Virtual worlds have evolved using the technology of the web and of video games. They exist amongst a growing social acceptance that there are digitally mediated forms of communication for business and pleasure. Telephone, email, blogs, social media status updates, fax, videos, photos, podcasts, websites, games and text messages all form part of this spectrum. People use some, or all, of these methods everyday in both business and social contexts. Each one has its own benefits and drawbacks. However, I would suggest, this is not the end of our evolution in communicating at distance, we have not solved everything yet. There is room for enhancement. Ideally we need things that work better for us and not just to fit in with the technology. We need something that does not overly filter or restrict how we need to communicate as humans.

So the question is should I be interested in people and how they choose to work, play, communicate and transact with one another?

If you are a technology or communication business this would seem an obvious answer. If you are part of a different industry then how your colleagues, customers, partners and competitors communicate needs to be looked at. If you are customer, friend, enthusiast or relative then you need to consider how to stay in touch with your peer group. If you have knowledge to share, people to educate or inform and you cannot all get your carbon atoms in the same place at the same time, then virtual worlds need consideration.

Virtual worlds are not the only solution; they do not replace all of the other ways of interacting. They do not replace physical human interaction, evolved over millions of years, either. They are not one thing tightly defined, it is not a binary decision, virtual world or not. When you drive your car with satellite navigation device and a needle telling you how much fuel you have in the tank you are already using elements of recreated spacial representation to assist you. Virtual worlds are already here, are already used in a multitude of ways to immerse people with one another at events and in data. Essentially people have been put back in the technology. That unleashes a great deal of creative and business generation talent. There is more potential to be unlocked in enterprise, education, art, entertainment and cross cultural understanding. The authors of this book have gathered together a large body of knowledge and experience with many types of virtual world interaction and applications. The authors also explore the path for the future. Hence this book forms a strong and well researched foundation on which to build or verify your knowledge. It can help you discover new business models and enhance existing ones of your own.

In technology and social adoption of ideas many people will go through the cycle of first considering it a joke, then worrying about it as a threat before moving onto understanding it is obvious. For those who

understand the inevitability of the use of these forms of interaction the authors are here to help build on what you know. Those who are concerned about the threats and risks will find those honestly addressed too, "Nothing will ever be attempted if all possible objections must first be overcome." - Samuel Johnson. Anyone still considering this a joke is welcome to find the punchline for us.

For me the bonds and interactions in the metaverse has had a massive impact on the way I work and who I work with. It has also changed how I interact socially with many more people, including the authors and editors of this book. You will see, I hope, this is all very real.

Ian Hughes / epredator
Metaverse Evangelist and Founder of Feeding Edge Ltd

Ian Hughes a.k.a. epredator *when online is a Metaverse Evangelist. He set about leading a band of like minded individuals and subsequently many thousands of colleagues in IBM into virtual worlds like Second Life in 2006, and beyond. A Consulting IT Specialist in IBM for 19 years and who has worked on leading edge emerging technologies his entire career is now an independent consultant and director of Feeding Edge Ltd , Taking a bite out of technology so you don't have to. He has been a programmer since he was 14. As a gamer he has seen a massive increase in the capability and design ethics within games and the rise of online gaming. In 1997 Ian started working on all things web, changing his perspective on the technology and the business due the much richer mix of people involved in the web revolution. Graphic Designers, Producers and Programmers all having to work together. As a digital native his epredator persona spans many Web 2.0 places, blogs, PSN, WoW, Xbox Live, Twitter, Flickr, Linkedin, Second Life etc. Understanding how to use that presence, still representing himself but with elements of theatre brought about by more creative expression online leads him to no longer be the programmer he grew up as.*