the escapist

EDITOR'S NOTE
by Julianne Greer

Girl Power, our issue on women and gaming, has gone on to be the most-read issue in the magazine to date, and letters and response continue to trickle in. The often controversial topic of women gamers and the attitudes toward them provides fodder for interesting debate.

Not being ones to keep away from stirring the pot for too long, we are covering another contentious topic this week: griefers. We invited several of our writers to express thoughts on and experiences with griefers and they had plenty to say. Dave Thomas contributed a piece on the greatest griefer in the realm of games – you have to read it to understand. Jim Rossignol stepped up with a look at some of the greatest acts of grief in *EVE Online*, including an infamous heist of over $10,000 of real-world cash. And Mark Wallace told us of the day The Grid disappeared in *Second Life*.

Enjoy these articles and more in this week's *The Escapist*.

Cheers,

Julianne Greer

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor: In the 11/11/05 "Otaku" issue of *The Escapist*, Shannon Drake discusses the rise of Japanese culture in the US, particularly the rise of anime and manga.

While I agree that this movement has definitely come into its own over the last five to 10 years, I wanted to point out that this movement has been a long time coming. Starting in the late '70s, but especially in the early to mid '80s, the American mainstream saw the introduction of a number of Japanese anime (*Speed Racer*, *Robotech*, *Voltron*, *Thundercats*, etc.) and other anime-inspired cartoons (*Transformers*, *Go-bots*, *He-man*, etc.). I remember "discovering" anime and manga in the '90s and thinking how exotic and new these films, shows and comic books were. Only in retrospect did I realize that I had been watching anime since I was a child!

One difference, however, between those shows and shows such as *Pokemon*, *Yu-Gi Oh* or *Sailor Moon* is that the shows in the early '80s were never billed as Japanese, while the Japanese status of modern anime seems to be one of their big selling points.

Timothy Kleinert

To the Editor: Sorry, but the article, "The View from Here" was a bit too one-sided if you ask me. I'm American and sometimes prefer games that are simple and fun than heavily realistic and online driven. With the success of the DS in America, it shows that gamers still care about games that are inventive, abstract and (most importantly) simple. Most of those console titles come from Japan unless you venture out into the Mac/PC shareware market. My tastes for gaming are a melting pot of genres and do not weigh to one or the other. I play everything from Metal Gear to Animal Crossing. In the end, it truly depends on what experience the player is seeking: "fun and adventures" or "serious and realistic."

Casey Gatti

To the Editor: I loved your article by John Tynes "The View From Here." I was beginning to think that I was the only person who thought this way, Nintendo just doesn't do anything for me anymore. The article made me laugh and gave me a sense of not being alone in this world. So thank you guys!

John Vanderpool

To The Editor: I am writing in response to Bonnie Ruberg's excellent article in Girl Power. Her ideas and conclusions about female monsters were very fascinating.

At one point in the article, Ms. Ruberg asks: "So what route is left for truly empowered female characters?" With regards to this question, I would like to point-out the recently released title *Gunstar Super Heroes* for the Gameboy Advance. This game allows you to play through as one of two protagonists, the creatively named "Red" and "Blue," on

any of one three difficulty settings, hence creating six possible paths through the game. I had finished the game on easy and normal with both characters before I bothered to flip through the manual, at which point I discovered that Red was, in fact, a woman (based on that last sentence it is pretty obvious that I had always believed her to be male). I would like to put aside the obvious discussion about my own gender-related prejudices and expectations for a moment and consider the character Red in light of the above-mentioned article.

Ms. Ruberg outlines three possibilities for female videogame characters in survival horror (I feel these categories can be applied to any genre): damsels, heroines and monsters. In *Gunstar Super Heroes*, Red is clearly a heroine. However, she is quite different from the types of heroines the author describes (sex objects meant to be subordinate to the male player). As stated above, I would still believe Red to be male had I not read the game's manual. It is not that Red has a distinctly male appearance, but rather, she is un-feminized. Her clothes fit but are not tight, her breasts are unnoticeable, and

the only showing skin is her face; she is simply androgynous.

So, we have an androgynous female heroine, which can be perceived in one of two ways: either the artist/developer has exerted control over Red's femininity and robbed her of it (assuming said person is male this could be taken as yet

another example of male dominance); or in Red we have the female lead that a female could look up to: She is not a sex object, does not require saving and is equal to her male counterpart, at times even coming to his aid.

However, there is another aspect to Red that I have not yet mentioned: her personality. Remember that I mistook Red for a male simply due to my own expectations of how men and women look and behave in videogames. Red's personality matches her color: she is fiery, aggressive and passionate. She believes in what she is doing and is furious towards her opposition. Yet this personality is equally androgynous, as it is not distinctly male nor female. So the question remains: Has she been robbed of her gender identity by having no distinctively female qualities, or is she the long sought-after respectable, powerful heroine?

I am inclined to believe the latter, for a few reasons. For one, she has many of the traits that, from what I have read, women look for in a playable character. Secondly, I believe that any sense of "gender identity" is largely culturally-imposed. Red does not have

any "distinctively feminine traits," yet I do not doubt that my concepts of said traits are a result of the culture I have grown up in. Finally, I believe that it would be impossible to give a character distinct gender-specific traits without sexualizing them to some extent.

Either way, when I play through the game as Red now, I am aware that she is in fact a she, and that does not change anything. Except give me even more respect for Treasure as a developer.

Jason Begy

To the Editor: I would like to discuss a letter sent in by Jason Begy in response to my own article, "Women Monsters and Monstrous Women."

Dear Jason: I think the overarching question you're asking (i.e. whether gender neutrality is better than sexualized gender identity) is an important one, and your description of *Gunstar Super Heroes*' "Red" offers an interesting example.

It certainly seems that Red, as a woman who is never labeled as such in game, is

able to sidestep many of the complicated gender roles discussed in "Women Monsters." She is a strong, capable heroine. At the same time, she avoids the possibility of becoming a victim of sadism and voyeurism on the part of players since, for the most part, they do not realize they are playing/controlling a woman. In these ways, she may seem to set a positive model for female characters, ones who do not need to be monstrous in order to maintain respect and avoid objectification. And as a fellow redhead, I can certain empathize with a fellow "fiery," "passionate" woman.

However, I would personally disagree with the concept of androgyny as ideal in representing women. It is, perhaps, the safest route, but it also circumvents the issue. For us, as members of a modern Western culture and a male-centered video game community, gender neutrality is never as simple as ambiguity. When we see a video game character who has not been officially assigned a gender, we rarely consider them to be androgynous figures. Instead, as in your personal experience with Red and *Gunstar Super Heroes*, we assume that they are male. Therefore, not offering an indication of a character's

sex is, in effect, the same as hiding her identity, or denying her of it all together.

You mention that Red has positive, "masculine" traits, which women often seek out in a constructive female character. Yet, I would argue that not only do we need to keep in mind the precarious foundation of our understandings of "masculine" and "feminine" - as you note - but also our understandings of "positive" and "negative," "powerful" and "weak."

Perhaps women do not need to take on manly qualities in order to become worthwhile. Assimilation, in my opinion, is not the ideal. We shouldn't have to ignore the fact that women are different than men. Of course, this isn't meant as a universalizing statement; every person has individual tastes, habits, qualities, etc. But to subsume femininity, whatever it may mean for a particular woman, into assumed masculinity, is to give up.

"It would be impossible," you point out, "to give a character distinct gender-specific traits without sexualizing [her] to a certain extent." I don't disagree with you. I would just add that, first of all, we should consider how this statement

reflects not just on female characters but male characters as well, and, second, that maybe sexualizing isn't bad. To remove the sex around a woman is literally to take away her sex. What we need to consider is how we can combine the power of a woman like Red, and the sexual identity that prevails in so many other female characters - how, in fact, the one can be made to feed off the other. This, in my opinion, had only been accomplished by those women who simultaneously inspire terror and attraction: namely, female monsters.

Bonnie Ruberg

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK

by Dave Thomas

Jack, I just want to say one thing: Don't sue me.

I wouldn't be your first. You've brought down the righteous hammer of justice on such varied personalities as Howard Stern, Rockstar and 2 Live Crew.

Since you are a real lawyer with a real degree from a real law school, I figure you have the tools to go after me, too. But wouldn't that just distract you from your war on videogames, your battle for decency? Anyway, I'm just trying to set the record straight here, say something about you that hasn't been said before, say something that might make sense out of all the information published about you on the Internet. I just want to try and understand why you hate videogames so much. So, like you Jack, I'm just doing my thing, and you know, curiosity is my only vice.

All Work and No Play...

Who is Jack Thompson? He calls himself the "Miami attorney the video game industry loves to hate - and with good reason." The good reasons typically cited by the industry, when the industry does choose to speak with a common voice, which is never, runs like this: Jack Thompson is a rabid game hater and just doesn't get it. He is convinced that games make people do things like become snipers and rampaging high school students. He is combative and humorless, and worse than that, he selectively uses facts to make his case to impressionable journalists, like those that work for CNN.

Fortunately, if you want to know more about Jack, he's not a particularly private man. He likes to go on television and hate games, post to online forums and hate games, and send out the occasional open letter explaining why he hates games. He even has an autobiography coming out which, we can only assume, provides a little more detail about why he hates games.

He's also got a growing entry in the Wikipedia, the weird mix of raw fact and scurrilous gossip we've come to refer to

for all things historical. And by that, I mean I'm going to rely on the Wikipedia a lot, even though I think some of it might be wrong. This might sound like a lazy compromise but I really think of it as good old booze-soaked journalism. Sure, you can dip your sources from the sharp quote factories of the industry analysis and pundit pools. Or you can rely on the inside source, nicotine-stained and world-weary.

And what does my inside source have to say? A lot, really. The man is a Florida-based medical malpractice lawyer. But his story is so fantastical at times, it would be at home next to classic tales like "Jack and the Beanstalk."

Jack's beanstalk is media attention, and his giant-killing forum is the courtroom. While he's fired legal shots at such massive targets as Sony and Nintendo, he's made most of his noise in the media making claims about videogames' harmfulness to youth and malicious indifference in the game industry. And along the way, he does things like accusing the Japanese of using games as a modern Pearl Harbor attack on American kids, demanding that Bill Gates personally pull Rockstar product from the

Jack's beanstalk is media attention, and his giant-killing forum is the courtroom.

Xbox and calling the FBI when someone makes a juvenile buddy icon depicting him. Really, Jack does things your grandma probably thinks sound reasonable, but leaves the average gamer scratching his head wondering why this guy has it out for games.

Jack Attack

Keeping track of Jack's activities is like trying to document an evening of binge drinking for an entire fraternity on a lost weekend in Vegas. You can make some general observations about "Mai Tai's here. Barf there." But you're really just dipping your toe into the raging river.

Since I started to work on my Really Big Jack Thompson story, he has: been denounced by the National Institute on Media and the Family; denounced them back; announced a contest to build a satirical game based on a gamer who goes on a rampage and kills a lot of people; had a couple of developers make the game; reneged on his offer to pay $10,000 to a charity if the game was built, which led the fine fellows at Penny Arcade to respond by writing a $10,000 check to charity to cover Jack's original promise and then sell "I Hate Jack Thompson" t-shirts, which led Jack to

send a letter to the Seattle Police Department suggesting the PA guys were harassing him. Most recently, activist gamers responded to Jack's threats against PA by urging the Florida bar to consider this as misconduct.

And I haven't been working on the story that long.

You can pick up the phone and call Jack. His phone number is on his website. Just don't expect much. If you're lucky, you'll get his answering machine. Leave a message, if you like, but unless, I suppose, you are CNN or Fox News, he won't call you back. If you're lucky, Jack will pick up the phone with a gruff, flat, "Hello." You won't get a, "Jack Thompson, Attorney at law. How may I help you and may Sam and Dan Houser burn a million years in hell for bringing *Grand Theft Auto* into the world." Instead you get a short cautious conversation along the lines of, "Who are you, what do you want?" - the sort of stuff Neo kept asking in the *Matrix*. If Jack warms up to you, he might even divulge his email address with a plea to "Not share it with anyone," since he's been getting a lot of death threats. If you are not lucky, he'll brush you off as a

fanboy looking for a pound of flesh with an, "I'm too busy to talk now." What's frustrating is whether you get happy Jack or mad Jack on the line seems to be a lottery. Every time I tried to arrange an interview with him, it seemed like a different Jack had answered the phone.

Both Jack's seem to agree, however, talking to the gaming press wasn't the best way to advance his cause. Better, I guess, to spend time on television getting the facts wrong (like claiming characters in *The Sims* come equipped with pubic hair and genitals) and stirring up concern in parents already too busy or lazy to just sit down in front of the PS2 long enough to see what their kids are, in fact, playing.

But what bothers me isn't that Jack gets things wrong in the name of making a point. It's that he seems to get them wrong just enough to make his point. And that's why, even though gamers righteously dismiss Jack as some square who's not hip to what the kids are doing, the rest of the world sees Jack as a guy in a nice suit who just might have a point.

And I wonder if this is actually his technique.

If you want to hurt someone, I mean really hurt them, don't make up outrageous lies. Tell lies that are so close to the truth that they might be true, even if they are completely made up. Tell the world that George Bush has that kid Mikey from the Life commercials tied up in the White House basement and no one can take it seriously. Our president may be many things, but he's not going to get a cameo in *Silence of the Lambs III*. Tell the world that Bush is in the pocket of the oil industry and it doesn't matter whether it is true or not. It just sounds plausible.

This is a tactic that Jack seems to understand well. He once called Janet Reno a closeted lesbian and that hurt because, well, honestly, would a straight woman wear her hair like that? When Jack calls Doug Lowenstein, the head of the videogame industry's primary trade group the Electronic Software Association, the Goebbels of the game industry, it stings.

Because, if nothing else, Jack knows how to hurt. And he seems to like it. Which makes him appear a lot like the frustrated 13-year-old boys in *Everquest* who have nothing better to do than build

Every time I tried to arrange an interview with him, it seemed like a different Jack had answered the phone.

up characters to level 8,000, and then spend day after day annoying people in such a monumental manner that we had to give the behavior its own name: Griefing.

The psychology of the griefer is pretty simple. When nothing else in the world is under your control, why not spend your remaining vital energy pissing people off? If you can't build something up, tear it down. A smoking crater is at least as noticeable as the nice building that once

...as a gamer and free speech advocate, I'm supposed to hate Jack Thompson.

stood in its place. If nothing else, people will know you are there. At least they will care about you, even if it is just to take the time to hate you.

And griefing doesn't just happen in the game world. I've heard these people aptly described as "sh** disturbers" for the simple reason that some people - a fortunately small fraction of a fraction of the population - can't leave well enough alone. If there is a neat pile of anything -

books, papers, people in a nice conversation at a party - the Disturber will come around and make a mess out of it.

Some people even turn this into an art.

I know a guy who corresponded with Charles Manson, was friends with Church of Satan founder Anton LeVey and has a fencing set said to be owned by former American Nazi party founder George Lincoln Rockwell.

A fellow writer, a rotund and omnivorous thinker who was liberal to the bone and as perceptive as a Geiger Counter once said of my pal, "He's an intellectual anarchist; he's not happy unless other people are unhappy." What's funny is that this guy, my friend with the interesting taste in pen pals, associates and memorabilia, was still connected to a basic form of order. He was not a Disturber. The people he found amazingly on the edge, further out than

his frontier of weirdness, were not just intellectual anarchists; they were, well, Disturbers of the first order.

And I'm starting to think that maybe, this is really the center of Jack Thompson. I think, deep in his bones, Jack likes flipping the Monopoly board over just to see the colorful confetti of play money flying through the air. Because it sure seems like Jack just doesn't want anyone to have any fun.

Manhunt
I wanted to talk to Thompson for the simple reason that as a gamer and free speech advocate, I'm supposed to hate Jack Thompson. And that sounds like the sort of challenge any free-thinking intellectual would jump at. Besides, for all I know, he may be on to something.

What we know for sure, when it comes to videogames and violence, is that we don't know enough. Games certainly have not spawned any apocalypse of violence. Then again, I'm not sure we should run around saying games have no effect at all. Of course they do. I don't play *Halo 2* for the pleasure of being bored. I like it because it is fun to blow someone away with a sniper rifle. It's

even better when you can tag some chump up close with a sticky grenade. If you can pistol whip another guy to death, that's just artistry.

My studied conclusion about games and violence is that games make us wild and crazy and bloodthirsty, but just for a controlled period of time in front of the screen. And from what I can gather, unless you are already in desperate need of a daily Halloween bucket of meds, this exposure to violent material doesn't leave you with any lingering urge to harm your fellow man.

Still, like Jack, I'm not a social scientist, a cognitive scientist or even a doctor of love. So I assume that Jack does what I do - scrape around for facts and opinions, try to figure out what is true and bother people with your opinions at cocktail parties. Only I suspect that Jack looks at the entire internet as his cocktail party.

What fascinates me the most about Jack is that the power relationships are all screwed up, sort of the way they are in a Quentin Tarantino movie. In most real life situations, someone is in charge and someone else has to go along with

things. Cops pull you over and you say, "Yes officer, no officer." And even if you go to court, you say, "Yes your honor, no your honor." Tarantino's films always seem to end up in some sort of a Mexican Standoff between people that love each other, and want the same things, but don't trust each other and might be too criminally insane to know the difference. This sort of sums up the Russian and U.S. Cold War policy of "mutually assured destruction," and how just about anyone feels about their mother-in-law.

And so it is with Jack. Because his dirty secret is out there for everyone to see. Jack Thompson needs the videogame industry. Without Rockstar and nutty child assassins, what would Jack do?

Personal injury law? Bankruptcy? Divorce mediation?

Nope. Everyone who likes to stir things up needs something to stir. And Jack needs the videogame industry to rise to the occasion. Don't you have to wonder what it's like being Jack? He brought legal action against Howard "I used to be the king of media," Stern and 2 "Didn't they use a naughty word in a rap song 20 years ago?" Live Crew? Jack needs games and, strangely enough, games need Jack.

No celebrity has really made it until they either been *Punk'd* or get a restraining order against some crazed fan. That's the standard of having attained the top in pop culture. And Jack is a reminder that the videogame industry is big enough and important enough and cool enough for someone to hate.

Just as Bowser had to rise to the challenge of foil and villain for Mario once Donkey Kong was co-opted into a big, furry good guy, gaming needs an ever present bad guy boss. Through confrontation, we can see what matters, what it all means, where it all ends up.

The difference between Bowser and Jack is more than a spiked turtle shell and a malevolent laugh. Bowser exists for the game; Jack exists in spite of the game. Like the online griefer, the contradiction is that when someone makes ending fun the focus of their fun, then it's only a matter of time until there is no fun for anyone. And that's no fun at all. 🎮

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THE DAY THE GRID DISAPPEARED

by Mark Wallace

It was not a good day for the virtual world. It was the next-to-last Sunday in October, a day before a major new patch for *Second Life*, a 3-D online environment that boasts 70,000 residents in the same, non-sharded world. It might have been a day like any other – except for the small spherical object one resident added to the stock of user-created content that makes Second Life almost unique among virtual worlds.

Adorned with an image of the G-Man from the *Half-Life* FPS games, the object had soon rezzed a copy of itself, and then there were two, floating side by side, low above the landscape of one of the 1,000-plus servers that make up the Grid that is Second Life. A moment later, each of those had replicated again, and there were four. Soon after that, there were eight, and then there were 16. Like the cell division that marks the beginning of life, the exponential growth continued. The spheres multiplied, overflowing the boundaries of the server in which they'd started and spilling over into neighboring regions, then into the regions that bounded those.

Eventually, according to some reports, there were 5.4 billion of them.

Who knows how long it took or what the exact sequence of events was, whether the servers went down one by one or spectacularly crashed out all at once. But by some point on that Sunday, they had all winked out. All of them. *Second Life* was no more.

Second Life gives its residents a great deal of freedom. They can create not only fantasy castles and other marvels, but scripted objects that can interact with each other, with avatars and with applications outside the virtual world as well. From time to time, an ambitious builder or scripter may overreach his or her talents. Create a linked chain of objects that need to be manipulated by *SL*'s physics engine and you can strain a server's resources to the breaking point. Accidents will happen in such a world. Servers will crash.

What kind of "accident" hit *Second Life* on October 23, though, is open to interpretation. Was it an "accident" that the self-replicating objects had been named GriefSpawn by their creator? Was it mere coincidence that this creative mind was a member of a *Second Life* group long renowned for its inflammatory builds and harassment of other residents?

Signs point to "no," that what happened on the day the Grid disappeared was not an accident at all, but the most effective denial-of-service attack *Second Life* had ever seen, one that came from within the world itself.

Residents, needless to say, were dismayed. Many of them spend hours a day there; for some it is a full-time job. Though there's no comparison in terms of loss of life and other damages, having *Second Life* flooded with GriefSpawn spheres was a bit like having your city flooded by a hurricane: Businesses were forced to close, residents were forced to evacuate and it would not be for days or weeks that the full extent of the damage would be known.
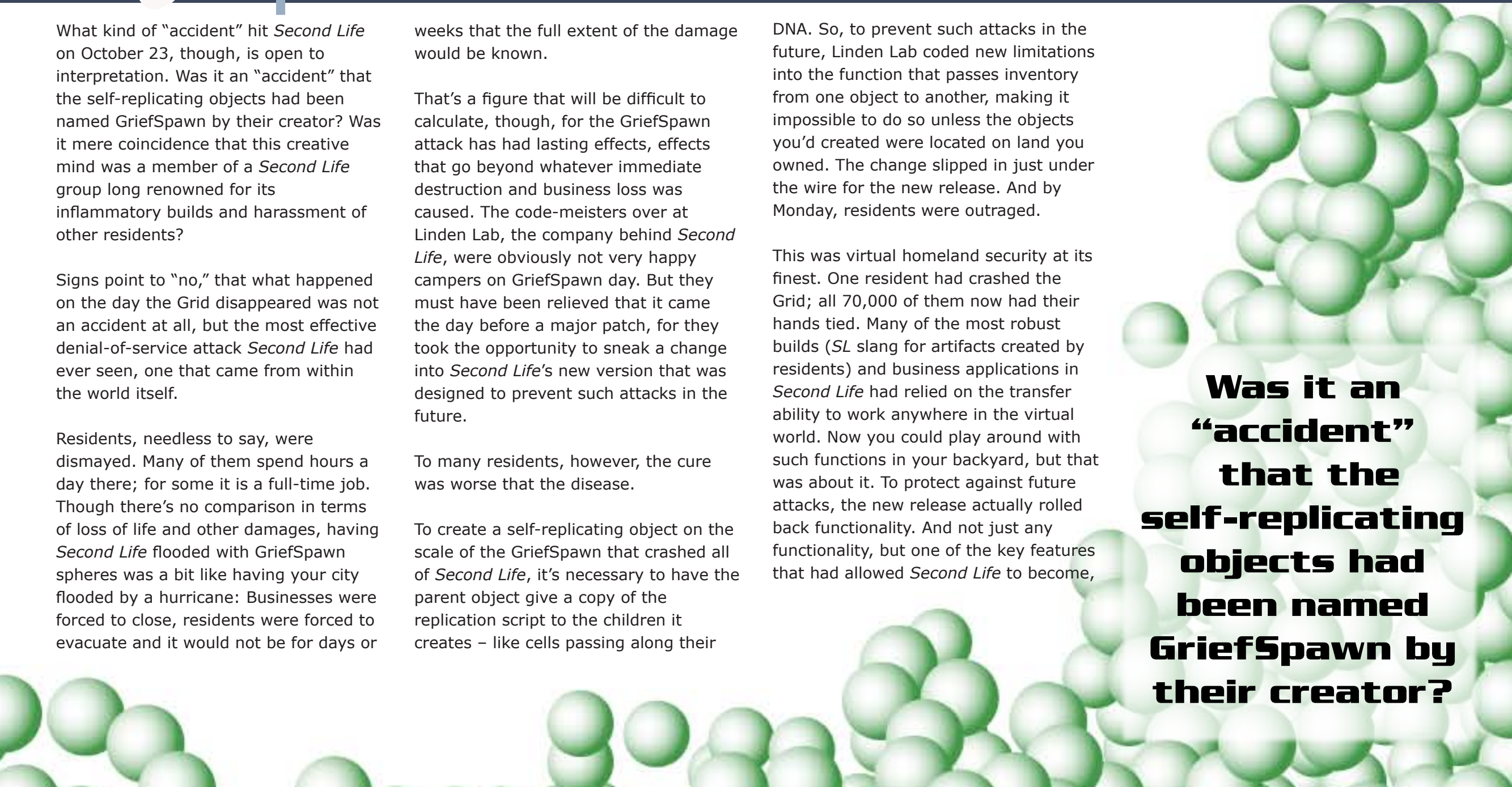
That's a figure that will be difficult to calculate, though, for the GriefSpawn attack has had lasting effects, effects that go beyond whatever immediate destruction and business loss was caused. The code-meisters over at Linden Lab, the company behind *Second Life*, were obviously not very happy campers on GriefSpawn day. But they must have been relieved that it came the day before a major patch, for they took the opportunity to sneak a change into *Second Life*'s new version that was designed to prevent such attacks in the future.

To many residents, however, the cure was worse that the disease.

To create a self-replicating object on the scale of the GriefSpawn that crashed all of *Second Life*, it's necessary to have the parent object give a copy of the replication script to the children it creates – like cells passing along their DNA. So, to prevent such attacks in the future, Linden Lab coded new limitations into the function that passes inventory from one object to another, making it impossible to do so unless the objects you'd created were located on land you owned. The change slipped in just under the wire for the new release. And by Monday, residents were outraged.

This was virtual homeland security at its finest. One resident had crashed the Grid; all 70,000 of them now had their hands tied. Many of the most robust builds (*SL* slang for artifacts created by residents) and business applications in *Second Life* had relied on the transfer ability to work anywhere in the virtual world. Now you could play around with such functions in your backyard, but that was about it. To protect against future attacks, the new release actually rolled back functionality. And not just any functionality, but one of the key features that had allowed *Second Life* to become,

Was it an "accident" that the self-replicating objects had been named GriefSpawn by their creator?

for a great many people, the only virtual world that matters.

The perpetrator was punished too, of course, reportedly given a permanent ban by Linden Lab. But there's almost no doubt he or she will be back. A borrowed credit card and a new IP address is all it would take. Perhaps they've learned their lesson, perhaps not. But the gods had spoken, the new laws had been passed down.

Fortunately, those laws were reversed soon after they were put into place. In this case, popular outcry had its effect. But if they'd stayed on the books much longer, the world of *Second Life* might have been in for far greater losses than any caused by the occasional griefer's global attack.

Second Life stands or falls on what it's possible to create there. The Grid contains almost no content created by the company that runs it. Linden Lab provides only a landscape (and sometimes not even that); the residents effectively constitute the largest content-creation team in existence, and one that pays for the privilege. In return they garner fun, fame and, in not a few cases, fortune.

But to make such a place truly fascinating and vibrant, much more must be possible there than simply the creation of shiny dream palaces. In fact, more must be possible than the creation of only the fine, attractive or even tediously dull things that many residents add to the Grid. Real life works the same way, after all. It may be possible to build a briefcase bomb, but that doesn't mean it enriches society.
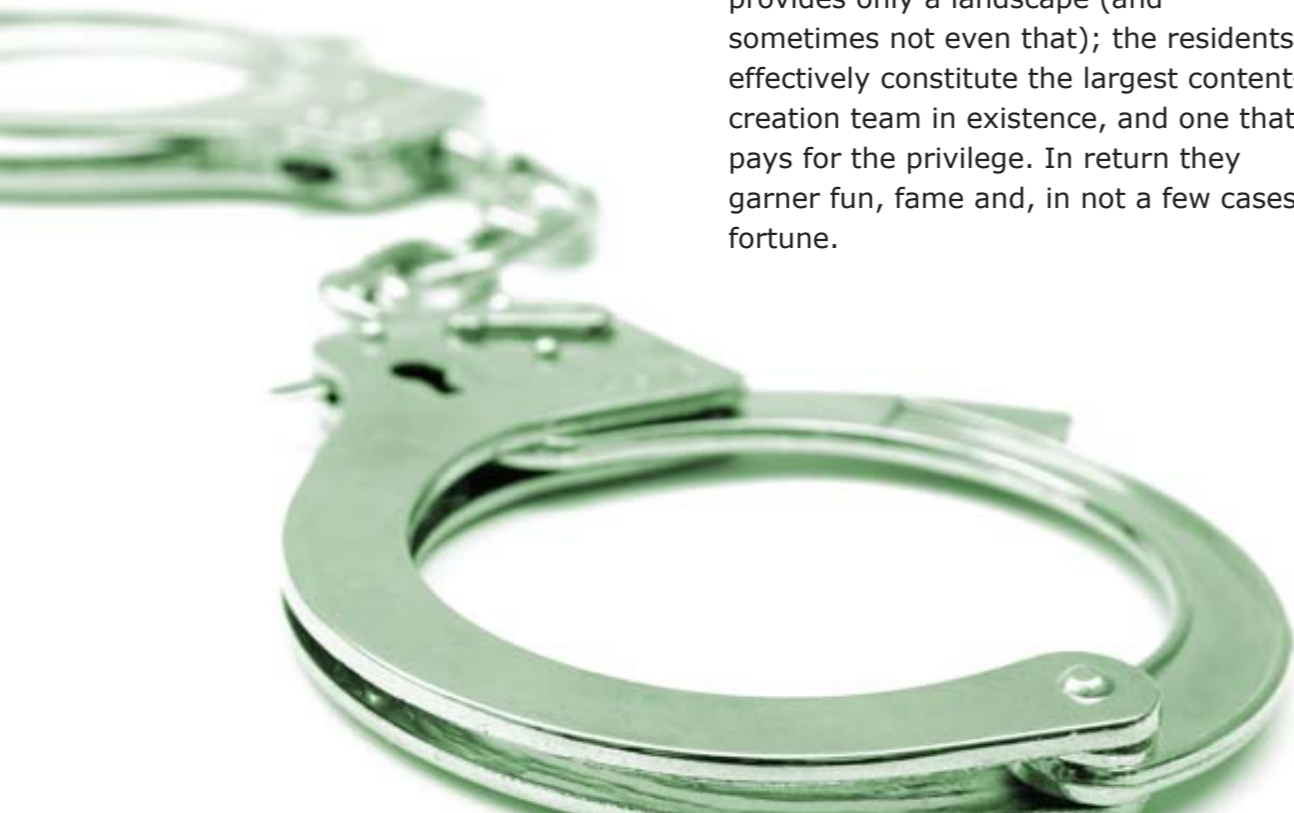
What's different about cyberspace is that the men and women behind the code control the physics of their worlds. The avatars of *Second Life* are free to fly around at will. But a few keystrokes on the part of the coders would change that. Until late October, the physics of *Second Life* allowed object-to-object transfers. Because of a crime, those physics were briefly changed.

And that's where things get tricky. Real-world crimes, of course, don't lead to changes in the physical laws of the world in which we live. They lead to changes in the civil and criminal laws. That's why we have such laws, because "bad" things **are** possible. Criminalizing murder

doesn't eliminate the threat, it simply raises the risks associated with committing murder.

Murder, of course, is something most people would agree should be eliminated from the world, if only it were possible. But incarceration is also possible under the physics of our world. Most people wouldn't want to change this, as it's one of the threats we use to convince people not to do things like commit murder. It's a tool of social engineering that makes our society a comfortable place to live. But if Joe Psychopath next door were to lock away your attractive neighbor down the street, it wouldn't be called incarceration, it would be called kidnapping. If you could change the physics of our world, would you want to get rid of jails just so you could get rid of kidnappers?

Because in a sense, that's how Linden Lab chose to deal with the GriefSpawn. The criminal laws of *Second Life* haven't changed; global attacks were strictly a no-no before October 23 and they remain against the "rules" today. But rather than put more cops on the street

or find a better way to register and ban individual users, the company chose to eliminate a good in order to eliminate an evil.

It should be said here that the code-wrangling team at Linden Lab is looking for a fix that would result in the best of all possible worlds, i.e., that would allow the good while still eliminating the evil. But that's not the point. Because no matter how foolproof the physics of your world are, there will always be a way to grief it. Ask any coder and they will tell you the same thing: There is no application without a bug, and no security system without a crack in it. The limited time and resources of a development team simply can't compete with the nearly unlimited curiosity and commitment of those who hope to find those bugs and cracks. And once found, of course, someone will eventually exploit them, whether your physics likes it or not.

Philip Rosedale, the founder and CEO of Linden Lab, says he is not building a game, he is "building a country." If so, it is at this point a country whose citizens have no voice, and which is run suspiciously as if it were, in fact, a

game. *Second Life*'s 7,000-word Terms of Service document (about three times as long as this article) contains all the same caveats as that of any game company's: Although users retain the IP rights to their creations, Linden Lab or anyone else on the Grid can use those creations as they see fit. LL can kick you out or delete your stuff "for any reason or no reason." And the Terms of Service and Community Standards, the documents that effectively constitute the civil, criminal and constitutional laws of the world, change so often and with so little notice that it's impossible to know exactly where you stand at any given moment. As a virtual world, *Second Life* is the coolest thing going. As a country, it sucks.

Any other country would have seen the GriefSpawn coming long before it hit. The griefer in question had been associated with a group in *Second Life* long known for its startling builds and its troubling antics. Refugees from the forums at SomethingAwful.com, the W-Hat group is also filled with creative and talented people. But their activities over the past year have put them at or near the top of the chronic griefer squad. At the *Second Life Herald*, where, as Walker

Spaight, I serve as Editorial Director, we've been covering these guys for months.

That they inhabit *Second Life* only means their griefing takes the form of their world: They define themselves by what they build. Highlights include apparent attempts to drive neighboring landowners off their land, builds featuring huge swastikas and enormous detached penises, a model of the World Trade Center in flames (complete with Death Star added for effect), harassment of other groups in *Second Life*, a graphic depiction of a murdered prostitute, and back in July, a client hack that gave them access to the private scripts and objects that run many of *Second Life*'s businesses.

Given that it was widely known that crashing the Grid would not be all that hard, how could you not have seen the GriefSpawn coming?

What Linden Lab should have done about it is a different question. No one wants to live in a police state, even a virtual one. But a state with no policing is almost as bad. Code may be law, as Lawrence Lessig points out, but law is

As a virtual world, *Second Life* is the coolest thing going. As a country, it sucks.

not the same as enforcement, and to expect the code to be not just the law of an online world, but the police force as well, is to put too great a burden on designers and programmers, and to limit what's possible in cyberspace.

Second Life is in an interesting position. With no competitive structure, it's not really a game. With no line between creators and consumers, it's not really a development platform. With no real laws and no government, it's not really a country. And even if it were all these things at once, it would still have to find some better definition of all these pieces and how they fit together if it's to avoid the kind of two-steps-forward, one-step-back moments - like the nerfing of object-to-object transfers - that have marked its development thus far.
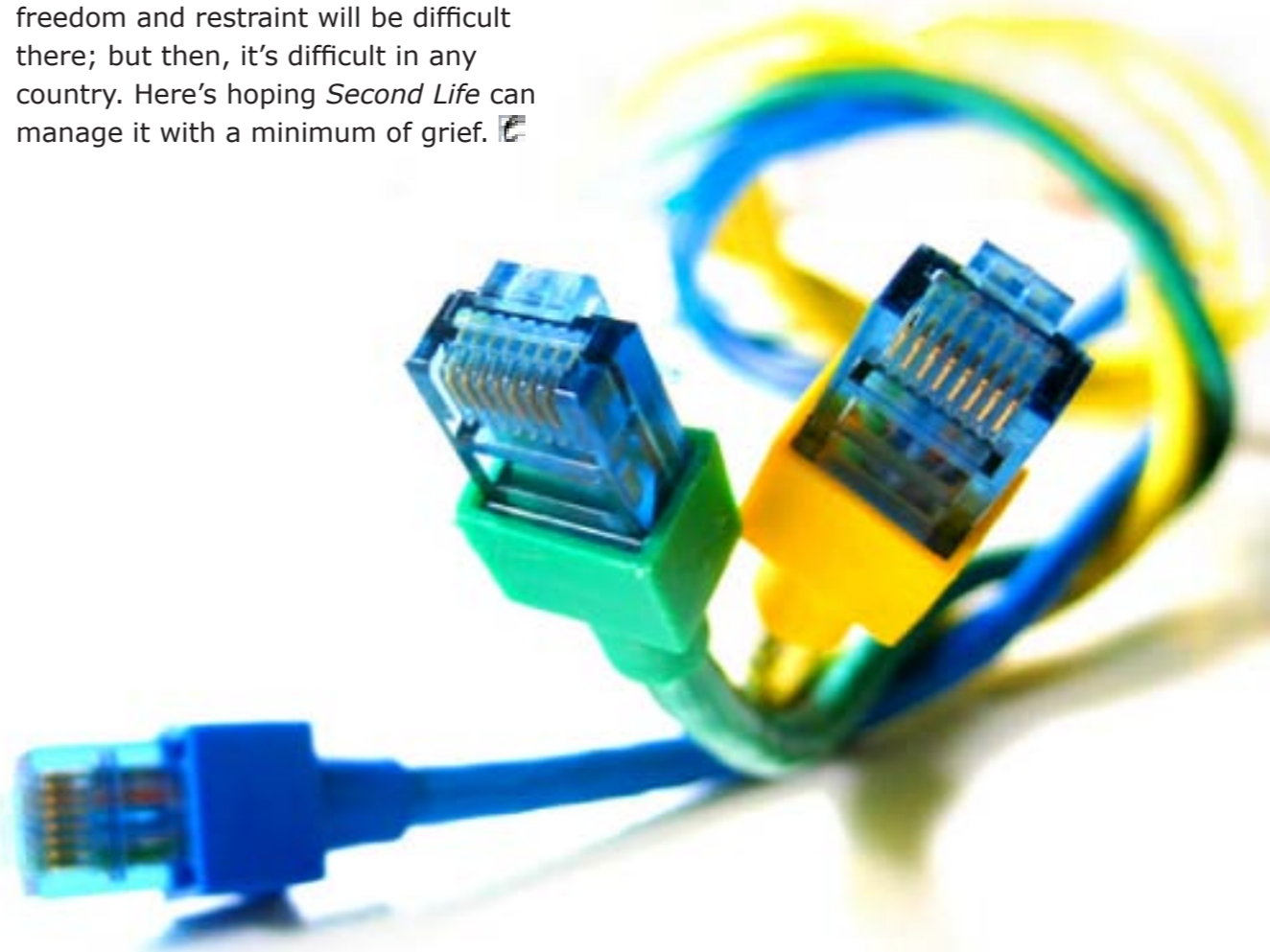
Perhaps we should thank the W-Hats, though. Perhaps it's people like them who will push *Second Life*'s society to take shape. Where griefers are concerned, the question is, where will Linden Lab draw the line? And, perhaps more importantly, how? Will the code remain law, and the enforcement remain at the whim of *SL*'s administrators? It's hard to see a robust world, one that

looks like an online country, developing from that. Or will policing the world be left in the hands of its residents? If so, Linden Lab will have to make clear what is ban-able and what is not - they will have to make laws that go beyond the code, or allow their residents to do the same. Already, vigilante groups have sprung up that seek to punish avatars they perceive as criminal; the problem is, their techniques usually amount to little more than griefing the griefers, and many of them get banned, too.

Letting residents affect each other's reputation through the kind of rating system found on eBay will only go so far. Bad reputations don't bother the W-Hats or the Something Awful goons; bad reputations are their lifeblood. At some point, enforcement is needed, enforcement of laws that are stable and clearly laid out for all to see, including in their application, and hopefully with substantive input from the people those laws are meant to govern. That may be a lot to ask of a virtual world, but if Philip Rosedale is serious about building a country - and it often looks like he's not, other than for marketing purposes - that's the kind of thing that will have to happen.

Meanwhile, the Grid continues to grow. And let's hope it continues. In many respects, *Second Life* is, in fact, the only virtual world that matters. The fact that you can create something that can make the Grid disappear for a day is only evidence of how much freedom its residents have – or did, until late October. Striking a balance between freedom and restraint will be difficult there; but then, it's difficult in any country. Here's hoping *Second Life* can manage it with a minimum of grief.

Mark Wallace can be found on the web at Walkering.com. His book with Peter Ludlow, Only A Game: Online Worlds and the Virtual Journalist Who Knew Too Much, will be published by O'Reilly in 2006.

A Deadly Dollar

by Jim Rossignol

The griefer is a player of malign intentions. They will hurt, humiliate and dishevel the average gamer through bending and breaking the rules of online games. But their activities are hardly extraordinary. Indeed, they only exist at all because of normal, human urges, albeit the ugly and reprehensible ones. They want glory, gain or just to partake in a malignant joy at the misfortune of others. But does griefing always mean overcoming the rules of a game? Can the intentions of the griefer be satisfied by something totally within the bounds of a game?

One game in which players are particularly cruel to each other is *EVE Online*. While naturally player vs. player (PvP) focused, its intricate economics emphasize the way in which malignant human impulses can find their way into a game-world. People will do anything for money, even virtual money, especially when it involves the challenge of emptying the wallets of unwitting players. Usually the gaming griefer is a lone chump, but in *EVE* the troublemakers might well be a group of intelligent, patient folk, as my later examples will illustrate.

Of course, online gaming has long brought out a tribal instinct in players; they band together looking for friends or fights, or even looking to pick on the vulnerable.

Many players will go out of their way to avoid what *Ultima*'s Richard Garriott calls "non-consensual conflict"; while for others the whole point of online gaming is to test their mettle - and that of their allies - against human opponents. Games like *Second Life*, in which almost all activities are non-adversarial, work hard to discourage conflict on all levels. For those players who want to play with people, but have no interest in playing **against** people, the idea of personal conflict is troubling.

Most gamers have been disposed to this pacifist attitude at one time or another, and who can blame us? I, for example, found being slaughtered by a higher-level enemy in *World of Warcraft*'s PvP needlessly unpleasant. It left no room for retribution, and hammering a junior gnome just to expunge some frustration was more grief than my conscience could handle. So I moved to a non-PvP server, where my adventurous dwarf has been happily unmolested by matters of guilt or bullying ever since.

But there's always the other possibility: We look for trouble. This is where my *EVE*-playing personality appears. I want battles, double-edged conflict.

This attitude is perhaps more common to gamers, who want to play to win against other human beings, be it in *Warcraft*, *Battlefield* or a game of internet mah-jong. It's easy to find this kind of conflict online. Most games are built around ideals of direct competition: rankings, hi-score tables, winners and losers. We've all been there, and liked it or not.

But then there is another kind conflict, subtler than that of the battlehammer or the bazooka. It's something that can hit

people harder than any deathmatch loss. It's more sophisticated and more satisfying than the most elegant *Counter-Strike* maneuver. It's malicious, but lacks the base stupidity of team killers or campers. It's the smartest kind of player griefing currently imaginable. It's the scam.
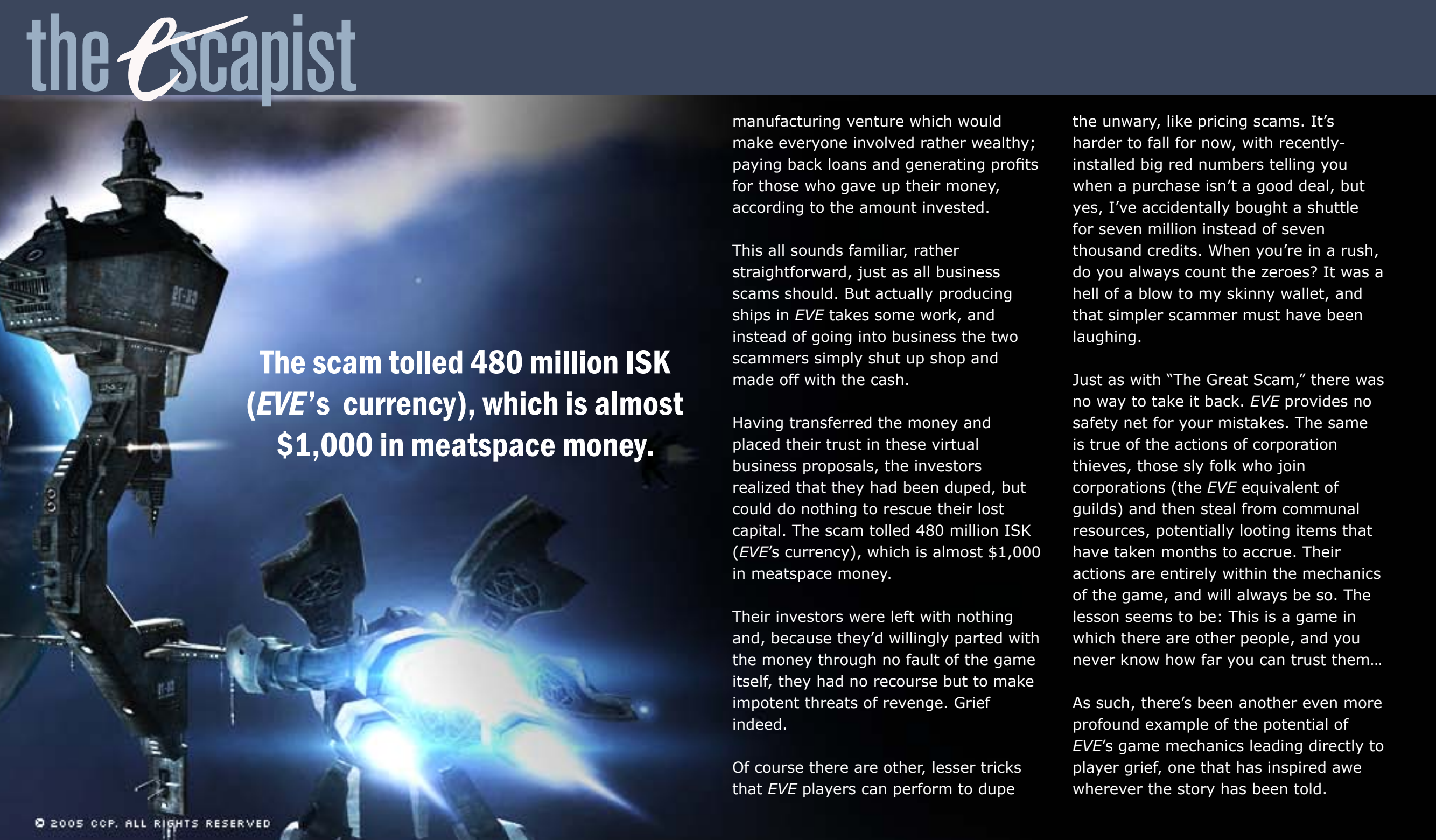
Most games aren't quite complex or realistic enough to allow scams to take place, but *EVE Online*'s multifarious galaxy, which hosts player-run corporations and a sophisticated market-driven economy (with all the functions and utilities that such operations entail) regularly suffers the machinations of the scheming ne'er-do-wells.

Many gamers have now heard of "The Great Scam," which was one of the earliest examples of how *EVE Online*'s game mechanics gave way to a massive rip off. The infamous 15,000 word article documented how two players were able to accumulate both the trust and the cash of a lot of other, more gullible players, simply by playing the kind of confidence tricks that investors rely upon in the real world market.

The scammer revealed that he and a friend had proposed an open business venture to purchase blueprints from which one of *EVE*'s most expensive and coveted battleships could be built. They played on the innocence of gamers, acting as if this kind of venture was a matter that was regularly enjoyed by *EVE*'s savvy players. Their investment was supposed to give rise to an in-game

We look for trouble.

manufacturing venture which would make everyone involved rather wealthy; paying back loans and generating profits for those who gave up their money, according to the amount invested.

This all sounds familiar, rather straightforward, just as all business scams should. But actually producing ships in *EVE* takes some work, and instead of going into business the two scammers simply shut up shop and made off with the cash.

Having transferred the money and placed their trust in these virtual business proposals, the investors realized that they had been duped, but could do nothing to rescue their lost capital. The scam tolled 480 million ISK (*EVE*'s currency), which is almost $1,000 in meatspace money.

Their investors were left with nothing and, because they'd willingly parted with the money through no fault of the game itself, they had no recourse but to make impotent threats of revenge. Grief indeed.

Of course there are other, lesser tricks that *EVE* players can perform to dupe

the unwary, like pricing scams. It's harder to fall for now, with recently-installed big red numbers telling you when a purchase isn't a good deal, but yes, I've accidentally bought a shuttle for seven million instead of seven thousand credits. When you're in a rush, do you always count the zeroes? It was a hell of a blow to my skinny wallet, and that simpler scammer must have been laughing.

Just as with "The Great Scam," there was no way to take it back. *EVE* provides no safety net for your mistakes. The same is true of the actions of corporation thieves, those sly folk who join corporations (the *EVE* equivalent of guilds) and then steal from communal resources, potentially looting items that have taken months to accrue. Their actions are entirely within the mechanics of the game, and will always be so. The lesson seems to be: This is a game in which there are other people, and you never know how far you can trust them…

As such, there's been another even more profound example of the potential of *EVE*'s game mechanics leading directly to player grief, one that has inspired awe wherever the story has been told.

The scam tolled 480 million ISK (*EVE*'s currency), which is almost $1,000 in meatspace money.

Compared to this awesome venture "The Great Scam" is positively miniscule, a mere trifle amid the majesty of *EVE*'s greatest takedown. This is more than a scam, and to refer to it as such only diminishes the scale of its achievement.

Revealed with a flourish on the *Eve Online* forums, the attack by the Guiding Hand Social Club on one of *Eve*'s wealthier corporations, Ubiqua Seraph, was a masterstroke of patience and cunning. Initially, the Guiding Hand, who had previously set themselves up as committed assassins, had been hired to assassinate the CEO of Ubiqua Seraph, and were to be paid handsomely for the task. Their method, though, was not the crude and difficult matter of waging war and killing the mark by martial means alone. Instead, the Guiding Hand infiltrated the Ubiqua Seraph to the highest level, taking 12 months to ingratiate themselves with the corporation and gain access to its extensive resources.

Like the 1930s FBI infiltrators who organized the Communist party meetings in which suspected conspirators were to be arrested, the Guiding Hand's own influence on the CEO of Ubiqua Seraph arranged the time and place of her doom. Not only did they schedule the trap, but the executioner was to be a fellow colleague, a director of her own corporation, and just another member of The Guiding Hand. When the time was right, The Guiding Hand ambushed their quarry in space, claimed the bounty, and pillaged the corporate coffers. What had originally seemed like a large sum was but a fraction of what The Guiding Hand plot would actually claim.

The mark lost her near-priceless battleship, one of a number of limited edition objects that the developers dropped into the game. She also saw the assets of her corporation, which she and her corp-mates had worked for 18 months to accrue, ransacked by Guiding Hand infiltrators. The Guiding Hand members who devastated Ubiqua Seraph took some 30 billion ISK in game money and assets, an amount that, if taken at current eBay exchange rates for *EVE*'s virtual currency to real cash, comes in at a staggering $16,500.

Ubiqua Seraph was far from destroyed, but it's impossible to gauge the psychological impact of such a brutal strike on the players behind Ubiqua Seraph itself. Could they ever trust other online gamers again?

All of which begs the question: Are these devastating events really just acts of griefing, or just smart play?

Both the scam and assassination take place within the spirit of the game, which is one of ultra-capitalist competition and faction-warfare, and yet they cause the maximum hurt and upset to the players who've been victimized. They were organized and executed entirely **within** the game mechanics (with the odd real-life phone call), and as such, did nothing to abuse the economic or combative systems the developers installed. The Guiding Hand and their like might as well have been seen as just another guild full of dedicated roleplayers, just playing along with the game. Or are they the

Are these devastating events really just acts of griefing, or just smart play?

worst kind of griefers? Perhaps they could be both.

"The Great Scam" and The Guiding Hand takedown were massive betrayals of trust that, potentially, had real-world financial impact.

It's the breaking of unstated trust between allies that represents the deepest injury, however. The Guiding Hand infiltrators, in particular, had lied through their teeth and manipulated other players for over a year. It demonstrated that in spite of appearances, no one in the *Eve* game world could be trusted, especially if they were playing the game **as it was meant to be played**.

What do the developers of CCP do when people agonize on forums and petition their losses in these scams and schemes? Very little. They know that, in essence, this is what it's all about: people interacting. And wherever they do that, however they do that, they end up causing some grief.

Perhaps this is the most exciting aspect of *EVE*: It is a genuinely cruel game. If you destroy people's resources, either by war, scam or personal carelessness, you are literally wasting their time. You destroy part of what they have chosen to invest: their lives. It's a brutal fact, but then what other game can be said to provide such thrilling risks, and such extremes of gaming possibility?

This is a line in the sand: between griefing for its own stupid sake, as something that can be switched off and ignored, and the kind of grasping malevolence in gaming that leads to real, financial consequences. With virtual cash, comes virtual responsibility, and all the greed and cunning associated with it. The events we've outlined throw those facts into sharp relief, and reveal a new age online of economic exploits. Could these scammers represent a new breed of griefer? A smarter, sharper creature for the massively multiplayer age? As humorist Spike Milligan so dryly observed: "Money can't buy you friends, but it can buy you a better class of enemy."

Jim Rossignol is a writer and editor based in the South West of England. He writes about videogames, fiction and science.

dood, it's part of the game

by Greg Tito

The wind gently blew the fronds of the golden savannah and they bowed to me as if in greeting. Having left the deep green forests behind me, the openness of the grasslands was as refreshing as the breeze on my green-gray skin. My long ears pricked up to hear the sounds of small mammals and birds chirping a high-pitched greeting. Far off, I heard a metallic crash and was reminded that although this land was beautiful, it was alien and dangerous. I could convince myself that the sharp scent in the air was the fetid pile of lion dung rotting a few yards to my left but it could very well be the scent of a blood furied Orc's sweat. Nevertheless, I gripped my staff tightly, bundled my robes about me and trudged softly ahead, scanning the horizon ahead for both Orcs and dung heaps.

My destination was Dreadmist Peak. The mountain was not far from the border of Ashenvale, where I had to sneak around the Orc outpost. Sentinel Starstrike had commissioned me to slay an undead summoner by the name of Sarilus

Foulborne. I was eager to explore beyond Night Elven lands and this seemed like just the excuse I needed. To be honest, I'd had this quest in my log since I was level 25 and now that I was 29, I figured this mage would go down pretty fast.

The slopes of Dreadmist jutted up in front of me and I began walking up a spur. About halfway up, a big red number flashed on my screen. A large cat appeared behind me and continued slashing at me. Bigger and redder numbers appeared above my head. I tried to throw some Pain on my attacker, but my cloth armor was ripped to shreds before I could even blast his mind once. I expired on the slopes of an alien mountain without much resistance.

My attacker shapeshifted into a huge Tauren, whose name was emblazoned in red above his head. It read, "Hellacow" (name changed to protect the asshole). He was way above my level, the skull in my target frame told me he was at least 39, but probably much higher. Before I

could release my spirit to the nearest graveyard (wherever that was) I read those dreaded orange letters in my chat log. Hellacow, a wonderful, immersive name by the way, had the gall to spit on my corpse.

I've been ganked before. Playing on a PvP server in *World of Warcraft* is going to get you ganked, no question. What happened next went beyond mere ganking. I was killed a total of 19 times over the next hour-and-a-half by this Tauren druid and whatever low-level Horde he could recruit. Despite the long corpse run, I made a sport of it. Even at full health and mana, I couldn't get his health below 75% and he often never let me get fully healed before backstabbing me out of stealth mode. Trying to get away by rezzing in shadows and healing myself didn't work. Neither did rezzing and running. The openness of the Barrens was beautiful, but it left me nowhere to hide. Plus, a druid with travel form and me without a mount made it

cake for him to catch up to me, kill me and spit on my corpse.

My experience is not unique. Many have been corpse-camped in Azeroth. But when the preceding story happened to my priest alt, I began to wonder. Who would do such a thing? What kind of a person would spend over an hour causing another player such agonizing boredom and grief? There was no chance for advancement for him in any way. The PvP ranking system does not give any rewards for killing a character so far below his level. He received no loot. He did not gain any experience points. We were not in a battleground where he could receive benefit from winning the board. I could not understand why anyone would do what he did. (I'm calling Hellacow a "he" because the avatar was a Tauren male model, and girls don't exist on the internet.) As a player, I could not imagine spending an hour terrorizing lowbies. I would get bored and move on to questing, leveling,

anything, after a few minutes. Any time not advancing my character in **some** way is wasted time.

I decided to contact the Tauren druid who terrorized me and ask him what was going through his mind while he was murdering my priest. But this wasn't really all that easy. As I mentioned, I play on a PvP server (Sargeras), and Blizzard doesn't let you create characters on both teams. I couldn't just roll up a Horde toon and whisper the offending Tauren. I **could** buy another copy of the game, create a new account and do so, but that wasn't really cost effective. Luckily, I had a friend who hadn't yet made a character on Sargeras, and I asked if I could use his account. After promising that I wouldn't make him look like an "asshat," he let me roll up an Undead rogue (everyone else has one, why not me?) and see if Hellacow was online.

As a player, I could not imagine spending an hour terrorizing lowbies.

I won't bore you with the details of leveling up Dominian in Silverpine while waiting for the tool to log into the game. (Ironically enough, I put his name on my "friends list" so that I received a warning when he signed on.) I actually got up to level seven before I heard the fateful ding. Here follows my chat with Hellacow:

ME- Hi there
HIM- ?
ME- You don't know me
HIM- Who R U?
ME- I'm the guy you camped yesterday.
HIM- What?

ME- Do you remember killing a Night Elf preist over and over and over again?
HIM- That you
ME- yep
HIM- No way
ME- Way
HIM- What do you want
ME- I want to ask you a few questions.
HIM- About what
ME- About why you decided to camp me for so long.
HIM- Dude this is pvp
ME- Yeah…
ME- There's nothing wrong with killing me.
HIM- Go back to care bear server if you want
ME- Once
HIM- You were in the barrens
HIM- Alliance shouldn't be there
ME- But you did it for over an hour
HIM- So
ME- What made you want to do that? Didn't you get bored?
HIM- you were so funny thining you could get away
HIM- I had to keep kiling you
ME- Because I was running away, you camped me?
HIM- Plus, I hate night elves
ME- If I had stayed still, you wouldn't have killed me so many times?

HIM- Too many NE on this server, imo
HIM- You all need to die
HIM- Maybe, idk
ME- Ok, listen, you got no rewards from killing me because I was gray, why do it?
HIM- It was fun
ME- It's fun to terrorize people?
HIM- Dood it's part of the game
HIM- My guildie was leveling an alt around there
HIM- We had fun killing you little priest.
ME- What fun? I died in two seconds everytime
HIM- Lol
ME- Youdidn't even let me heal
HIM- You healed sometimes
ME- When I was hiding in the bushes
HIM- I saw you
HIM- You name was red
ME- It almost worked
HIM- You could have signed off
ME- So you enjoyed killing me, who had no chance against a 60 and his friends?
HIM- Hell yeah.
HIM- Howd you get this character/ no cross-faction I thought
ME- Did you think about what fun it was for me?
ME- Friends account.
HIM- Fun for you?
ME- Have you ever been camped like that/

HIM- Happens all the time. Not so much now but bfore I was 60
ME- Did you like it?
HIM- No but now it's pay back
ME- Ah, you were enacting revenge on my character for perceived wrongs against you? This is the proverbial gauntlet we all must run through in order to have played the game successfully and reched 60?
HIM- ?
ME- Neer mind.

That's about all I could get out of the bastard. He actually had more to say than I expected. Hellacow could have been like, "you SuxXoR!" and put me on his ignore list, much to my chagrin. I should be thankful that he even remembered me and could form basic sentences. He actually touched on quite a few points that I want to look at more closely. I also spent some time getting other players thoughts on this just to make sure my own feelings on the subject weren't totally skewed by my recent encounter in the Barrens. For the record, I'm defining griefing as killing any character so far below the offender's level as to reap no benefits and/or repeatedly killing the same character as they resurrect (camping).

HIM- Dood it's part of the game

As with any MMOG, the basis of the *World of Warcraft* is your interactions with other players. These can be great experiences, like "5-manning" Gnomeregan with a pick up group that doesn't actually suck. Or they can make you want to rip your hair out, like running that same instance with a tool for a priest who fears every mob and doesn't heal (happened to me last week). It's the same as dealing with people in real life. I don't like the people who beg for money from me on the street, but I can't change their behavior. There is nothing in the game's mechanics to prevent Hellacow from repeatedly killing me, so I can't really fault him for playing the same game that I am. He just plays it in a different way than I do, albeit an incredibly frustrating and annoying way, but since when has the internet brought out the best in people?

The Daedulus Project, a comprehensive compilation of MMOG research, actually has data which refutes the misconception that people are more vicious online than off. "The internet does indeed allow people to feel less inhibited, but as [this data] suggests, the internet doesn't turn people into pathological liars and thieves, but rather, courageous knights and brave warriors whose motives are benevolent." I'm glad to see that such research exists but I wish I had something to back up how many asshats I seem to encounter online on a daily basis.

HIM- You were in the barrens
HIM- Alliance shouldn't be there

This is a little easier to understand. The PvP dynamic of *WoW* is that there are two opposing factions which are always at war. A Horde character should kill an Alliance character whenever they see each other and vice versa. "One kill is a 'friendly' bashing. I hate Alliance, so I kill them. 'Hate' is part of the game... I don't actually **hate** the person behind the character. They are just my in-game enemies," said Jord (Illidan) but I think Turonyen from the Graffe Forums said it best, "They are horde [sic] and they must be eradicated. They shouldn't be allowed to stroll around in contested areas like they own the place."

I chose to play on a PvP server and I don't regret that choice. It is always exciting to venture into contested zones,

> There's nothing in the game's mechanics to prevent Hellacow from repeatedly killing me, so I can't really fault him for playing the same game that I am.

looking over your back for any Horde that may be swooping down on you. It's not a namby-pamby normal server which would protect me from being ganked, but neither is it a roleplaying server where people's Troll priests are acted out in game.

But as Hellacow and the others point out, there exists a form of roleplaying even on the PvP servers. I, a Night Elf from the Alliance, was in Horde territory and should be punished for being there. It is a kind of artistic justice meted out by a 13-year-old in Tauren's clothing.

HIM- Plus, I hate night elves

Griefers often make up a reason to do what they do. They have their agenda and if anything screws with it, they must do what they can to rectify the situation. In this case, an irrational hatred of one imaginary race in an imaginary world leads Hellacow to grief me. This behavior isn't surprising as much as it is frighteningly consistent with history. Human nature is such that we have prejudices based on appearances. The perception that there are too many Night Elves leads to the assertion that the people who play that race are not as

good as people who play a less common race, like Tauren. I am not trying to equate griefing in a videogame to racism (well, maybe a little) but there are dangerous undertones in this kind of thinking. Committing violence (if griefing can be considered violence) because they feel empowered by a crusade to rid the world of one race is freaking scary when you think about it.

But then there are the (perceived) righteous reasons we can make up. As Ringo Flinthammer (Silver Hand) stated: "The only people … below my own level that I don't get honor for that I've killed have been folks who killed an Alliance quest NPC. Those NPCs were worth nothing to them, and they were doing it just to be obnoxious. So they can spend some time in the penalty box."

HIM- You could have signed off

This is perhaps more descriptive of my character than Hellacow's. They say the best way to beat a bully is to ignore him. I was told that so many times growing up that it was a kind of mantra. But something never let me just take the abuse and move on. I always had to fight back, no matter if I ended up with a

bloody nose or wasting an hour rezzing my Night Elf priest. I didn't want to log, letting him know that he had beaten me. I continued to fight, even though I knew it was pointless. In retrospect, I should have taken Jord's advice in this situation, "Take a break! Don't rez! Walk back to your body and then go make yourself a snack. Take a nap. Do whatever makes you happy. It's break time! The campers are just standing there, eagerly watching their screens, whilst you're relaxing, eating, drinking or perhaps making love to your wife. In my opinion, it's the best remedy." Wise words, especially the part about the sex.

HIM- No but now it's pay back

I understand the revenge motivation more than anything else Hellacow cited. I admit to killing Horde toons more frequently if I had been ganked recently. And if a lower-level character comes up to me and "/spits" and "/farts," I have no problem teaching him a lesson. This goes for camping too, as Caheen (Deathwing) explains, "There's also the camping in retaliation for being camped. Being able to break out of a 'getting camped' situation will then make me camp the original offender for a time."

It's the kind of artistic justice meted out by a 13-year-old in Tauren's clothing.

But the constant revenge as a level 60 character on those beneath your level is a little too extreme. Does Hellacow see himself as a senior fraternity member hazing the pledges? I hated those guys in college and I hate them in *World of Warcraft*, too. The revenge motivation is ultimately faulty because inevitably, the victim would want to wreak the same havoc and thus begins an unending circuit of transgressions and griefing. But perhaps that is Hellacow's goal all along.

The shades of gray and white flickered before my lifeless corpse. As a sparkling wisp, I had just completed the now-memorized journey through the oases

Minutes passed on the grassy knoll in the Barrens. Nothing happened.

and glens of the Barrens on the way back to my lifeless form.

Throughout the journey I had hatched the best conceivable strategy for defeating Hellacow. Having employed various sequences of healing myself, casting offensive spells and buffing myself, I believe I stumbled upon a novel way of exacting the heaviest amounts of damage while keeping myself from being hit with whatever the druid would throw at me. This was it. This time I would defeat this cow bastard and break free from his corpse-camping grasp. I positioned my ghost in a strategically appropriate location and cautiously pressed the accept button on the resurrection dialog box.

I reappeared in the material world, between Dreadmist Peak and the oasis directly to the south. A glow surrounded me as I cast a Power Word: Fortitude on myself and immediately felt healthier. I turned left and right, then finally all around, with my staff brandished before me and a Mind Blast spell on lips. For the moment, I didn't see anyone near me. Hellacow had tried this tactic before, appearing out of stealth in cat form and slashing me before I could do very

much. But this time I was prepared. I stood there, my fingers poised over my hotkeys, ready to press them in the correct, invincible sequence which would bring me certain victory.

Minutes passed on the grassy knoll in the Barrens. Nothing happened.

It seemed my adversary, my nemesis for the past hour, had deserted the battle. Hellacow, I was now sure, had finally grown bored of me as prey and moved on. As I gained more energy from my resurrection and scanned the horizon for any Horde, I reflected on the last hour and 29 minutes. This was the ultimate mockery, I decided, of griefing in *WoW*. At the end of the match, one combatant is forced to just leave. There is no game mechanic to say that you won or lost, like in the battlegrounds.

In the end, there is just no point.

Greg Tito is a playwright and standup comic residing in Brooklyn, NY. He is currently splitting time between World of Warcraft, a new D&D 3rd edition campaign and finishing one of his many uncompleted writing projects.

Griefing for the Greater Good

by Laura Genender

A Tale in the Desert's (*ATITD*) legal system is an in-depth, flexible tool that allows players to create laws and affect the game. Laws can be used to ban players, change names, award titles, restrict accesses and for many other purposes. The game's developers impose only a few restrictions: They allow nothing that will alter the ending of the game or any of the "Tests" required to reach the ending, nothing impossible to code (for obvious reasons), and nothing that makes the game overly easy (dubbed the "IWantaPony veto").

But for some reason, this feature is rarely used to make laws to deal with griefers.

This is how Mafia was born, a character whose name would be recorded in *ATITD* history as one of the most notorious griefers of *Tale 1*. (*ATITD* is one of the few MMOGs with a start and an end - when the game is finished, it starts over.) In truth, the character was originally created to counter Khepry, a character played by a GM for an in game event - at the time, the players didn't know that Khepry was any more than a greedy, lucky player. Khepry had "found" the only source of magnesium in Egypt and carefully monopolized the area with mines, charging exorbitant prices for the crucial material.

Many players approached Khepry, asking him to share the magnesium. Many players were turned away. Among them was Knightmare, a long time *ATITD* player who has always been a critic of the legal system and how it is used. "I've known for a long time that the legal system is a flawed design. One of those flaws is that the laws that are band aids [sic] are usually [passed] while the ones with real meat fail."

After some consideration, Knightmare and two other players banded together and created the character Mafia. "[Khepry] wouldn't share, we knew that sharing would help all of Egypt; I took it upon myself to make him share using any means necessary."

Knightmare's plan was simple, if not honorable: "We were going to build several sculptures that would completely encase his mine, and build them complex enough so that no one could actually mine in the area…. We were planning on using this to create as much lag in that area as possible." The Mafia players also planned to grief those who interacted and traded with Khepry, creating a sort of embargo, but they had not yet decided how.

"I wasn't interested in running around and griefing half of Egypt." Knightmare came up with Mafia for the purpose of aiding Egypt — with or without the other players' consent. "Mafia was going to be a strong-armed way of getting things done that Egypt needed done." But things didn't go as planned. One of the other two Mafia players decided that

Egypt needed a challenge to make a law rather than a vehicle to go around it.

While the sculpture plan was in the works, Mafia Player #2 decided that Mafia could be used for other purposes. In an effort to "let people know we're serious," Player #2 emptied over 250 kitchens belonging to the Nileside Café, a non-profit player-created organization designed to help players raise their Gastronomy rating above 250. When Knightmare found out, he knew it was

over; Mafia was no longer a vigilante, but instead a villain.

Player #2 issues a challenge to Egypt: "Make an actual law to take care of griefers instead of just banning me" - or Band-Aiding the situation, as Knightmare would call it. Alas, the challenge went unanswered, and Mafia was banned via conventional "Band-Aid" methods. By this point, Knightmare had pulled out of the deal: "It wasn't something I wanted to be involved with at that point."

Mafia is an unusual case among griefers. Your average griefer plays to hurt, not help, and lasts a week or two at most on average. Mafia, on the other hand, was created with the intent to help the game

and the players, and his legacy and his players remained in the game long after the character was gone.

Knightmare was not even ashamed of what he had done. In fact, at *Tale 1*'s Amnesty (a confessions event that is held at the end of each *Tale*) Knightmare revealed the identity of two out of the three Mafia players - the third chose to remain anonymous.

We'll never know whether Knightmare's method of fighting griefer with griefer would have worked. But the very fact that Mafia was created "for the good of the game" says something about Mafia's creators and sponsors' mindsets. Like a government coup, Knightmare and his team were willing to defy the game's built-in democracy and set up their own secret police. They were willing to do what they felt needed doing with or without public backing. Their motivations were pure, but in the history books of *ATITD*, the name of Mafia will always go down as a griefer.

Laura Genender is a Staff Writer for MMORPG.com, and is also an Editor for Prima Strategy Guides.

Mafia was no longer a vigilante, but instead a villain.

NEWS BITS

Internet Monroe Doctrine Engenders Controversy

ICANN is the privately run group that literally runs the internet. Every website, server and domain ultimately exists in one of their databases. ICANN was set up in the late '90s to help keep the internet, well, interconnected with itself. Without a governing body, numerous countries, most notably Brazil, China and Malaysia, are likely to create their own, smaller versions of the internet hidden behind an iron curtain of firewalls.

The fact ICANN ultimately answers to Washington, and Washington alone, has a lot of countries up in arms over what that might ultimately lead to. They're calling for the organization to give up its control and cede it to an organization not yet created by the UN, a request the federal government has disregarded recently.

Experts are likening the government's response to the Monroe Doctrine, which was written in the early 1800s to forbid all European states from expanding further into the Western hemisphere.

Department of Homeland Security Chimes in on Sony Root Kit Controversy

Stewart Baker, the Department of Homeland Security's assistant secretary for policy, has chimed in on Sony's creation of anti-piracy software that secretly installs itself to users' PCs when they play affected CDs, saying:

"There's been a lot of publicity recently about tactics used in pursuing protection for music and DVD CDs in which questions have been raised about whether the protection measures install hidden files on peoples' computers that even the system administrators can't find."

Perhaps resulting from Baker's comments, Sony has opted to stop bundling the software with their audio CDs.

Casual Friday

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Jerk on the Internet

by Shannon Drake

I pull the pin on the grenade, fling it down, watch it explode and repeat until I'm dead. I chuckle to myself. Half my team is on the ground around me, sprawled in circles around the spawn. The chat begins to flow in, a black rain of hate and human misery.

"OMG U TK"
"dude cut it out that's not f**kin funny"
"Vote this asshole off the team!"

Does it stop me? Hardly. I feed on misery like the pink ooze in *Ghostbusters II*. The next round, I have enough for a decent gun. I purchase it and whirl like a dervish as the round begins. High caliber rifle rounds penetrate just about all the members of my team and the voice-chat wailing of my fifteen-year-old teammates makes me smile. We're all dead for about three minutes, until the counter-terrorists wipe out our wounded survivors and keep us from our fiendish goal. Maybe I'm some kind of freedom fighter? Nah, I'm just a jerk on the internet.

It didn't take much for the jerk side to seduce me. I was a psychology major. Human behavior fascinates me. When I met my first team killer in *CounterStrike* - and I don't mean the guy who accidentally plugs a few teammates, I mean the guy who sets out to make his team cry - I didn't pull away. I am the monkey that touches the monolith. I picked up a stick and poked at team killing (TKing). I had to find out what was behind it. I peered into the abyss, and the abyss peered back and whispered about how fun it was to make people scream and gnash their teeth. I agreed.
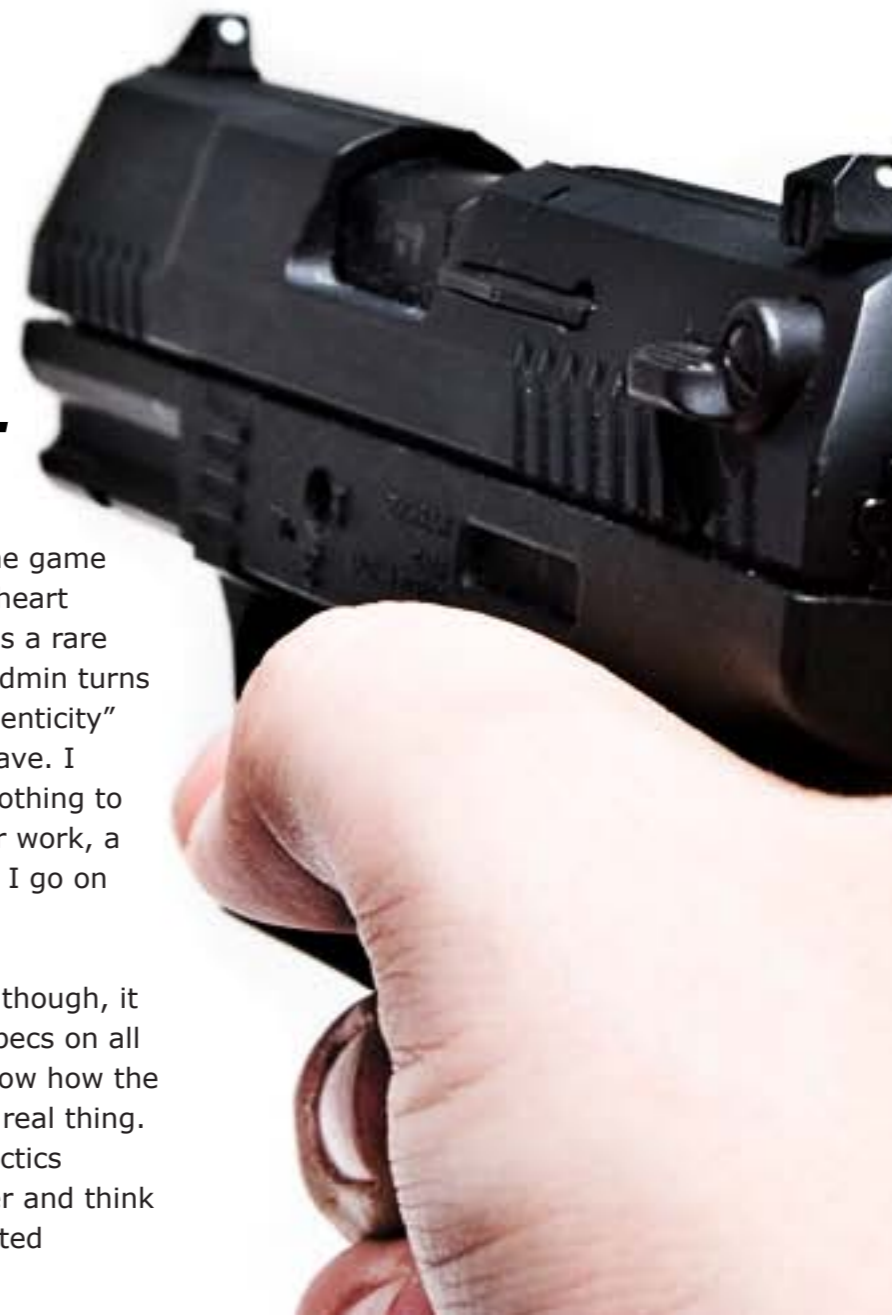
Understanding the griefer mindset begins with this: We don't take the game seriously at all. It continues with this: It's fun because you react. Lastly: We do it because we're jerks and like to laugh at you. I am the fly that kamikazes into your soup. I am the reason you can't have nice things.

Griefing your own team in *CounterStrike* is fun because your average

I feed on misery like the pink ooze in *Ghostbusters II.*

CounterStrike player treats the game with the seriousness of open heart surgery. Damaging my team is a rare treat. The misguided server admin turns on friendly fire, seeking "authenticity" and hoping everyone will behave. I don't. *CounterStrike* means nothing to me. It's a way to unwind after work, a way to kill a few hours before I go on with my day.

For the *CS* players I run into, though, it **is** their day. They know the specs on all the weapons and probably know how the game guns compare with the real thing. They act like they invented tactics because they discovered cover and think "Rush Right!!!" is a sophisticated

strategy on a par with Patton and Lee. In an entertainment sphere infested with hormonal teenagers and internet tough guys, *CS* sinks deeper. *CounterStrike* is infested with overly serious teenagers, drawling guys who like guns too much and people who take things way too seriously. And me.

And since I was the jerk on the server, the advent of voice chat was a boon to me. I'd played *CS* for a long while, but when I could actually hear the voices of those I'd TKed, their adenoidal voices raging with adolescent fury, is when I blossomed. I got to listen to smack talk and high-pitched yelping, and I acquired a whole new avenue into messing with people's lives. Dropping a grenade into my team's spawn isn't particularly funny, but doing it while blasting "Banana Phone" turned griefing into a multimedia

art form. It also increased my urges to screw with people. Angry chat messages just don't hold the thrill of listening to a guy's voice getting higher and higher, quivering with righteous indignation, threatening my mother and myself. I will keep pushing until I get kicked or until I hit tears, tears of pure comedic gold.

If I make you cry, you've made my day. Listening to a man brought to tears by a video game is a story I'll tell to all my friends. Just knowing that somewhere out there is an angst-ridden adolescent slumping against his keyboard crying tears of rage because of me gives me a charge. Crying over a video game means you need to step back and realize you're in too deep. Put down the controller and the keyboard and realign your life for a second. I'm not a movie, a poem, a TV show or even a good story in a good video game.

I'm a jerk on the internet.

If I make you cry, you've made my day.

Millionaire playboy Shannon Drake lives a life on the run surrounded by Japanese schoolgirls and video games. He also writes about anime and games for WarCry.

Real World Grief

by Allen Varney

Individualist anarchism, a political philosophy hundreds of years old, has now been conclusively discredited by massively multiplayer online games. These cyber-societies give players anonymity and freedom, and what happens? Five percent of them start attacking, disrupting or harassing their fellow players, sowing chaos and misery for absolutely no reason. Without social hierarchy, regulation and punishment, these griefers would behave the same way in real life. Mutualism and utilitarian principles would break down – or anyway, all the victims would waste their lives airing their grievances in online forums. Therefore, individualist anarchy can never work.

Don't believe it? Look at some of society's many, many non-gaming equivalents of online griefers.

Couple Breakers

You know how in *City of Heroes*, some guy will beg to join your team, and as soon as he does, he teleports you into some nearby solid object? The closest equivalent in Japan are the wakaresaseya ("couple breakers") - separators for hire, professional destroyers of relationships. Want to divorce your spouse without paying a lot of alimony? Hire an operative from Office Shadow or Lady's Secret Service to seduce the spouse, make her (or him) fall in love with the operative, and sue **you** for divorce. Then, the job done, the operative abandons the spouse and vanishes. Dump your girlfriend, lose your husband, drive away that mistress or fire that longtime employee. It costs about $100,000 – a bargain!

Founded in the early 1990s by private detective Kiyoshi Hiwatashi, the wakaresaseya business skyrocketed after a 2001 TV drama about a glamourous young breaker. Half of Japan's 2,000 detective firms started engineering freedom from unwanted partners. By 2002, a backlash rose amid rumors of yakuza (mob) connections. The largest private detective trade associations banned couple-breaker services. Now, many of the same agencies offer fukuenya ("professionals who restore relations") services. People who previously hired a firm to split off a troublesome partner started hiring the same firm to get them back together with the same partners. And you thought your love life was screwed up...

Disease Carriers

Irish immigrant Mary Mallon (1869 -1938), AKA "Typhoid Mary," was the first recognized carrier of typhoid fever. She worked in New York City as, oh god oh god, a household cook. Immune to the disease herself, she infected 22 people between 1900 and 1907, of whom one died. Health officials tracked her by the trail of victims and apprehended her, though she fought them vigorously with fists and a fork.

The NYC Health Department confined Typhoid Mary against her will to North Brother Island in the East River. She sued in 1909, and in 1910 the Health Commissioner released her on the condition she never work as a cook. Mallon agreed, but apparently couldn't find a decent job outside the kitchen. After five years, she changed her name to Brown and resumed work as a cook. She infected 25 more people (two deaths). The Health Department confined her again to North Brother for the rest of her life, 23 years. She died of pneumonia.

Mallon wasn't the only typhoid carrier known in her time, nor even the deadliest; Tony Labella caused 122 infections and five deaths. Mallon also wasn't the only carrier to break her promise not to work in food; restaurateur Alphonse Cotils kept working after being informed of his contagion. So though Typhoid Mary is history's most notorious disease vector, she's just one example. Then there's all

those *World of Warcraft* players who tried hard to contract the corrupted-blood plague and then rushed back to the nearest city to spread it around...

Thrill Killers
Leopold and Loeb weren't even close to the first PKers (player killers), but they were among the most notorious murderers of the 20th Century.

Nathan Leopold, Jr. (1904 – 1971) and Richard Loeb (1905 – 1936) were a couple of rich 19-year-old Chicago college students who thought they were criminal masterminds. For kicks, they spent months planning a "perfect crime," kidnapping and murder. On May 21, 1924, Leopold and Loeb abducted and murdered 14-year-old Bobby Franks, a friend of Loeb's kid brother. The perfect crime rapidly fell apart, and the two masterminds were quickly caught. In prison they reveled in their media notoriety.

Superstar attorney Clarence Darrow, the "Old Lion," defended the two in their 1924 trial. He kept them from hanging on the gallows, but the judge sentenced each to life plus 99 years. A prisoner attacked and killed Loeb in 1936. Leopold was paroled in 1958 after 33 years in prison; in that year he published
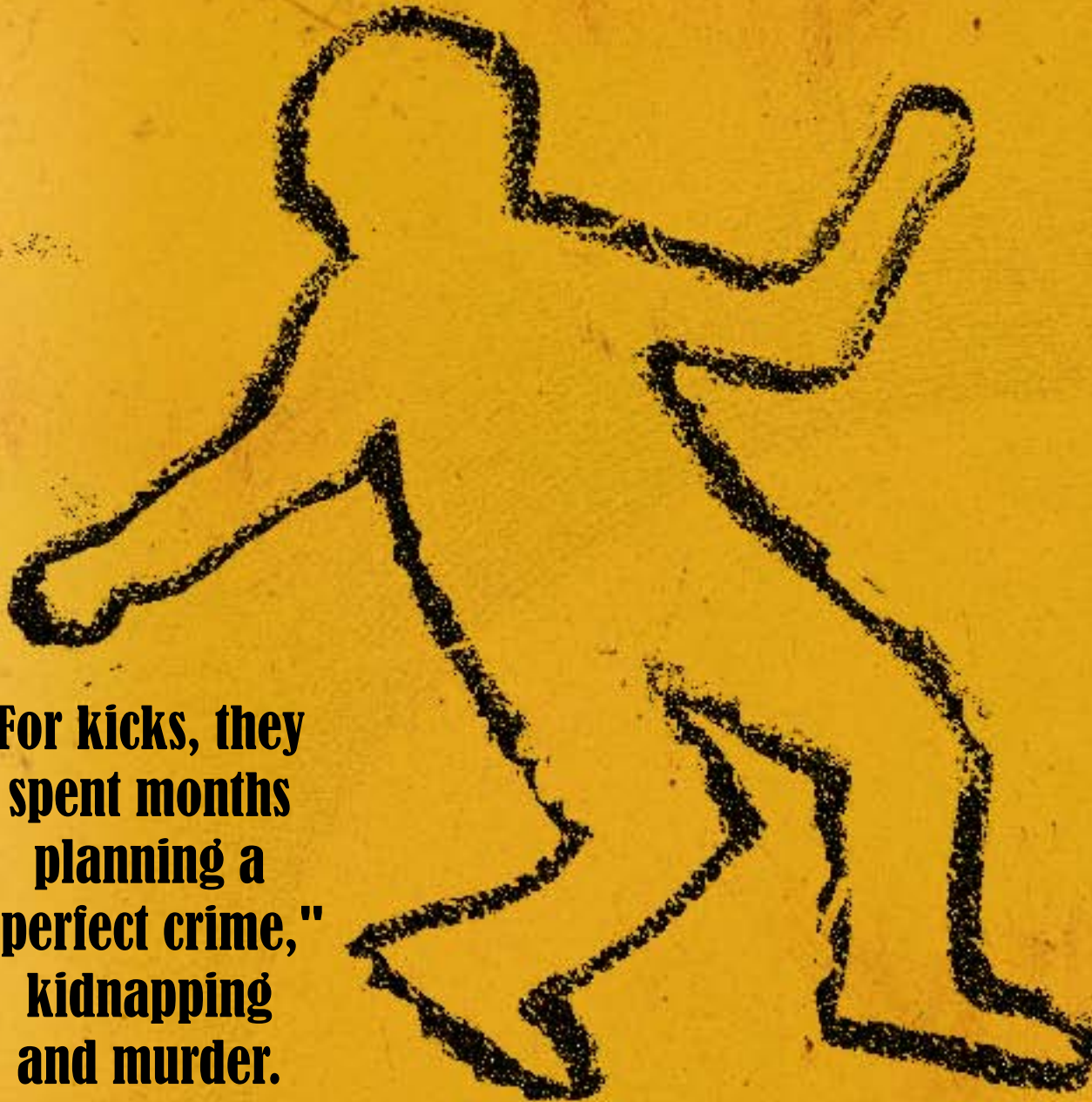
his self-serving autobiography, *Life Plus 99 Years* . He moved to Puerto Rico and worked as a hospital technician. He died in 1971, aged 66.

The Columbine of its time, the murder inspired novels, plays and movies, the best of which is probably Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*. Wonder if some current griefer will attain so much notoriety he gets tipped for Hollywood?

Wiki Vandals
Compared to couple-breakers, disease carriers, murderers and spies, the pencil-neck idiots who deface Wiki pages are as lightweight as you get. But there's a lot more of the Wiki vandals; nobody knows how many, but search on "Wiki vandal" to glimpse a widespread discussion. Some junior vandals try replacing pages with obscenities; after grownup users revert their edits, the kids get bored and leave. More pernicious sociopaths introduce subtle errors into benign articles, which can go for long stretches without correction.

The practical guard against this graffiti-spraying is sign-ins, e-mail validations, and a whole security apparatus. But diehard Wiki proponents, the net's version of utopian community zealots,

For kicks, they spent months planning a "perfect crime," kidnapping and murder.

These environments are a sociopath's playgrounds.

say this undermines the Wiki ideal, the spirit of community.

And More...
Agents provocateur, mafiosi, mercenaries, serial killers, rapists, junkies, confidence artists, spammers spammers spammers, codependent spouses, man-eating tigers, kindergarteners and today's biggest griefer....

Osama bin Laden
Well, duh.

Why We're Hosed and What to Do About It
Last month Robert Aumann shared with Thomas Schelling the 2005 Nobel Prize in Economics for their work in mathematical game theory. Aumann, 75, teaches at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His work concerns whether cooperation increases if games are continually repeated. Aumann proved mathematically that cooperation is less likely when there are many participants, when interactions are infrequent, when

the time horizon is short or when others' actions cannot be clearly observed – in other words, when you're playing basically any major online roleplaying game. These environments are a sociopath's playgrounds.
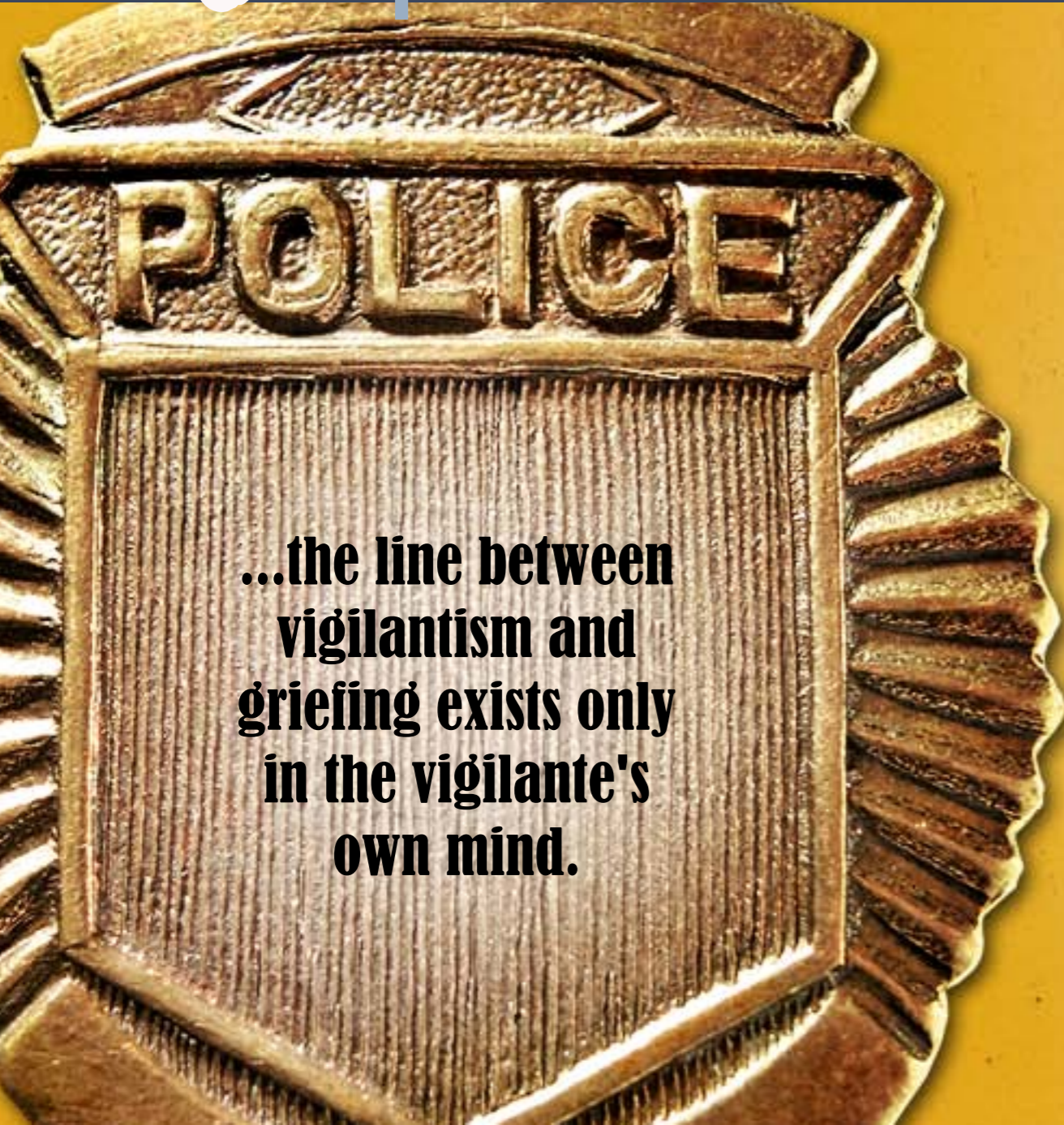
So we're inherently, provably screwed. How, then, do we handle vandals online? The only workable solution to date has been a fearless no-tolerance policy of banning griefers from the game. This in itself shows the fragility of online society – the Ban Hammer is both the ultimate and only weapon. The trouble is, banning just drives the griefer to a different game, where he continues his dubious career. We should have a more nuanced solution.

One alternative that's fun to contemplate is vigilantism: Post griefers' credit card info and let aggrieved players take care of matters themselves. Their problem-solving abilities are rich and various.

George Hayduke ("The Master of Revenge") has made a whole career of telling victims how to get even – though, as Hayduke will be the first to tell you, he writes for entertainment purposes only! His dozens of books include, well,

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the escapist

> ...the line between vigilantism and griefing exists only in the vigilante's own mind.

Get Even, as well as *Revenge is Sweet*, *Righteous Revenge*, *Screw Unto Others*, *Up Yours* and a couple of treatises on pistol silencers. (I once found a site that formerly offered Hayduke's books as pirated .PDFs, but had removed them after "a request" from Hayduke. Man, of all the people in the world to steal from...)

But even aside from hair-whitening legal issues, this is no answer. Vigilantes, though they start as a solution, always become the problem. In fact, the line between vigilantism and griefing exists only in the vigilante's own mind.

So must online communities resort to the old standby: police, laws and punishment? Are we just repeating the settlement of the Wild West?

Maybe not – or at least, not only that. As networks grow to encompass more of our lives, we'll develop routine access to people's records of past behavior. We could imagine a Griefer Standard, a defined data format game companies might adopt to identify and characterize griefing players. These players, after all, cost these companies a lot of money in support calls from victims. If a game's

Terms of Service permitted the company to share your interchangeable Grief Profile with other companies, players' complaints against you might follow you from game to game like a criminal record. Games could allow griefers, but automatically red-flag them. Online game communities could then adopt social practices older than laws, and perhaps more effective: shunning and even ostracism.

Couple breakers have been around a decade, and disease carriers have only been recognized for a century or so. But many forms of griefing are as old as humanity. But online worlds have new tools at hand, and need not resort to the established legalisms of meatspace society. Game worlds can become the laboratories for new social systems, which may turn out to work – why not? – in wider areas of a networked society. It's worth a try. Let's give it a shot.

Allen Varney designed the PARANOIA paper-and-dice roleplaying game (2004 edition) and has contributed to computer games from Sony Online, Origin, Interplay, and Looking Glass.

MEET THE TEAM

Each week we ask a question of our staff and featured writers to learn a little bit about them and gain some insight into where they are coming from. This week's question is:

"Who is the real or fictional villain that you love to hate the most? What makes them #1 on your Most Wanted list?"

Shannon Drake, "Jerk on the Internet"
Darth Vader, for going from "I am all that is evil in the galaxy" to whiny teenybopper.

Laura Genender, "Griefing for the Greater Good"
Captain Hook. I was a huge Peter Pan fan when I was little, and even to this day I feel wrong wearing red.

Joe Blancato, Contributing Editor
Hannibal Lecter any day of the week, and twice on Sunday.

JR Sutich, Contributing Editor
Boba Fett. He was more of a bad ass at age 8 than Anakin ever was. He was such a badass, that no one even had to use his name in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Vader this, Vader that, whatever. Tell you what, at the end of *Return of the Jedi*, only one of the two is still alive, and it's not Darth Noooooooo!

Mark Wallace, "The Day the Grid Disappeared"
For Crimes Against Journalism, Jayson Blair heads my most-wanted list, for lying to millions of readers and making life harder for everyone who's trying to do an honest day's work of bringing news to the world.

Julianne Greer, Executive Editor
Definitely Maleficent from Disney's "Sleeping Beauty." She was so delightfully dark as the self-proclaimed "Mistress of All Evil" and made quite an impression on my very young mind, from her name to her horned headdress. And the fact she turns into a fire-breathing dragon, on top of being an evil fairy, just takes the cake.

Allen Varney, "Real World Grief"
All right, I confess to total comic-book geekhood in naming Vandal Savage (http://www.hyperborea.org/flash/vandal.html), the immortal supervillain in DC Comics. He started the Illuminati, ruled Egypt, hung out with Charlemagne, and has outsmarted lots of superheroes, just because he's seen it all and done everything. I don't hold with his whole world-conquest shtick, but otherwise, what a wish-fulfillment fantasy!