the Escapist

EDITOR'S NOTE

by Julianne Greer

Some of our faithful readers may notice a slight change in our issue schedule this week. We have moved "The Home Invasion," originally scheduled for this week, to next week. In its place, we have "Generation G," an issue focusing on how different generations of gamers are affecting each other's gaming experiences.

In the United States, we are celebrating Thanksgiving this week. Thanksgiving is traditionally a time to be with family and friends, and we felt "Generation G" was a good match for the holiday. Indeed, many people's early gaming memories involve their families during holidays.

In addition to the issue change, we're also changing our semi-weekly publish schedule this week to allow our staff to spend the holiday with their families and friends. We will be publishing all of our content on Tuesday this week, including the Meet the Team feature we normally publish on Friday.

Next week we will be back to our normal, twice per week schedule, but for now, check out what we have for you: Allen Varney returns to tell of some gamer friends of his who are finding games to be useful parenting tools. Newcomer Glenn Jarrell shares the difficulties of being a 41-year-old gamer. Spanner discusses his own experiences with the generation gap between himself and his niece, Alex. Enjoy these articles and more in this week's *The Escapist*.

Cheers and happy Thanksgiving,

Julianne Greer

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor: I just read Dave Thomas' alleged "profile" of me. How utterly sad that this man, Dave Thomas, considers himself a journalist.

Jack Thompson

To the Editor: The issue was great, but I'd like to point out two observations.

The first is the general trend this exposes. While griefing occurs predominantly in MMOGs, it also occurs to a lesser degree in older games. From the original *Diablo* to *WoW*, griefing has been in the gaming community for a long time. It seems in the articles that it only exists in new games, which is not true. It was just harder before to interfere with the game – a good thing in terms of giving gamers more power, as Mark Wallace shows.

Secondly, this indicates that the gamer society is becoming more mainstream. Griefing means there's people out there that don't care about the game but play anyway – which is a good thing. Why? Because what the gaming community needs right now is exposure more than all else. Expose that the gaming world is a living, working world, as with *Second Life*, and not just for 17-year-olds living in their parents' basement, as the popular conception is. Break the stereotypes and people like Jack Thompson won't matter anymore.

Sean Li

To the Editor: [Regarding "The Day the Grid Disappeared"] The article was fascinating and the point about needing some sort of system of law, as opposed to restructuring the physics, is well taken. It balances the human needs better.

I think one should not give up the physics solution too quickly, however. Replicating viruses work so well in computer systems since there is no real cost for duplicating things. In the real world duplication has real costs, be it energy, resources or time.

So why not introduce some sort of cost for replication in the virtual world? Some sort of effect that makes normal copying work unchanged, but forces waves of copying to slow right down to a crawl. That way normal freedoms are not impacted, while malicious copying is dampened.

One could consider schemes in which subsequent generations of objects need an ever increasing amount of delay between them. Or perhaps the act of generation would require some sort of investment of some resource (money? health? percentage of server CPU?) that needs to be paid before proceeding. The

point is that there are things that can be tried.

Sure there might still be ways to hack things, but at least it will not happen so trivially, and perhaps any violations can happen more visibly, so that the "cops" of the (soon to be invented) legal system can then jump in.

Ray Blaak

To the Editor: I was just reading the escapist for the first time, excellent stuff! Good read.

Just thought I'd correct a couple of things in "A Deadly Dollar," I'm the CEO of Guiding Hand Social Club and one of the people that had a rather big part to play in the Ubiqua Seraph job.

Anyway, Mirial lost an Apocalypse Navy Issue, she was killed by our operative Arenis Xemdal in an Apocalypse Imperial Issue (two of a kind). The navy apoc isn't all that special, worth over 2 billion ISK at the time, not really limited edition, unlike the imperial issue. Also we got paid up front, not upon completion of the job.

Nice article anyways, just nitpicking really. :D

As to "The Great Scam" referred to, it's just something the SomethingAwful people made up, based very loosely on real events (entirely different scam), changed to make it more entertaining than it actually was.

Zeraph Dregamon

To the Editor: Normally, I am full of praise for your excellent web magazine (although I do feel it tends to have a bit of a MMOG obsession). But reading the item "Jerk On The Internet" in last week's issue, I have felt compelled to write in and criticize it.

Put simply, it irks me that the writer feels the need to justify his obnoxious and antisocial behavior by cooking up some pseudo-scientific, self-aggrandizing reasoning for it, and worse, polluting an intelligent and entertaining gaming magazine with the results. The whole article reads like an elaborate confession as he attempts to rid himself of guilt by projecting reasons onto his moronic actions, even resorting to simply insulting those who are (quite

reasonably) annoyed with him, by branding all *Counter-Strike* players as brattish 15-year-old gun nuts.

He doesn't even stick to his excuses for his obnoxious habit; one minute he is "(fascinated by) human behavior," the next he is doing it to teach those crazy counter-strikers to lighten up; the next it is a "multimedia art form." Lastly, Shannon, if you're reading this, please write something worthwhile with your evident talents instead of trying to find reasons to be a pain.

Otherwise, congratulations to all *The Escapist* staff and writers for putting together such an enjoyable, informative and polished weekly read.

"Appleseed"

To the Editor: Anyway you can make *The Escapist* a paper magazine delivered for a small fee? I like the feeling of opening my mailbox and being able to read something physical vs a computer screen. Plus, I like to read on the train.

Aldo

When Gamers Breed

by Allen Varney

Donna and Jack Kidwell's first recruits to their *World of Warcraft* guild were their three children, Harrison (12), Epiphany (9) and George (6). At their home in Austin, Texas, the whole family games online together several nights a week - though, as Donna explains in her blog post "No raiding after 9 pm." If the party waits too late to get going -

Clouds gather on the horizon, and those first warning signs appear: loud, exaggerated yawns from the eager young stealther who dares not admit exhaustion; peevish commentary regarding that one player whose addiction to the in-game auction holds up the show an extra 20 minutes; requests for "stamina potions" (**I need a COKE**) start pouring in, or worse yet … the dreaded "Coke, Coke Coke Coke" mantra.

I've known the Kidwells since they were in college at the University of Texas. We played *Illuminati*, *Cosmic Encounter* and a dozen other board and card games; I sat in on Jack's *Shadowrun* roleplaying campaign. After they had kids, I saw them less often, though they kept me posted on their *Magic* and *Legend of the Five Rings* trading card game collections.

Knowing the parents as I did, I knew the Kidwell children would grow up to be, not only gamers, but also great kids. Donna and Jack discovered a fact lost on our culture's anti-game crusaders: Gaming is an extraordinarily effective parenting tool.

This is especially true in computer games; "Kids own the environment," Donna says. "It's their turf. Warren Spector, I think, talked about gaming as

> ## "For me, competing against my child on a simulated racetrack while discussing our strategies and sharing lots of laughs in the process is quality time."

a 'narrative' that you own. He's right - children can talk about their gaming experiences for hours on end. It's difficult to exhaust them. So what could be more ripe for pedagogy? It's so nice to have kids creating their own myths."

Why don't we hear much about parents like that?

Gamer Moms and Dads: Off the Cultural Radar

It shouldn't be strange to imagine parents gaming with their kids. The Entertainment Software Association reports, in its "Top 10 Industry Facts," that the average gamer is 30-years-old, the average game buyer is 37, and 75% of all heads of households in America play electronic games. You'd think at least some of those people have, you know, procreated.

In August 2004, Laura Gulledge, a high school teacher in Alexander City, Alabama, wrote a WomanGamers.com article called "Confessions of a Gamer Mom." "Computers, video games, digital music - I love it all! Should my family go camping or compete in multi-player mode on SSX3? My answer is: Why not both? There's room for gaming in any

healthy childhood. It's up to us to find the balance. [...F]or me, competing against my child on a simulated racetrack while discussing our strategies and sharing lots of laughs in the process is quality time."

The forum topic on Gulledge's article brought an outpouring of agreement:

"People believe if you spend your time gaming that you are neglecting responsibilities. That is so not true. It is a matter of time management. My 17-year-old son and I play many of the same games - *Counter-Strike* and *Day of Defeat* are two - and we talk a lot about it. At the age he is, it has really kept the lines of communication open for us because I am able to relate to him. It has made it easier for him to come talk to me about other things in his life."

"My boys are six and three, and love to play games too, especially the six-year-old. Some of the best family fun we've had was pairing up with the boys (dad with one, mom with other) on our PCs and going head-to-head in *Halo* or *Battlefield Vietnam*."

"I think the biggest questions or comments I get as a gamer mom, whose kids game too, are 1) 'Well, as long as the games are educational games I guess it's okay,' and 2) 'What time limit do you put on how long they play?' I think people are rather shocked at my answers. Just what does 'educational' mean anyway? *Darkstone* certainly isn't 'educational' in the traditional sense, and yet my sons have learned how to add and subtract into the millions (out of necessity) [and] read long words (Dexterity, Vitality, etc). As for time limits.... again, some dirty looks occur when my answer is 'none.' We lead by example. [...] I know I would be *incredibly* annoyed if my husband put some arbitrary time limit on my gaming, and I think it would frustrate [my children] the same. They do a really great job of balancing the time they spend on their interests."

Obviously these views seldom make it into the media. Instead, we hear alarmism from opportunistic politicians, talk show pundits and every busybody with a letterhead. None of them play games with their own kids, or at least none admit it. Dr. Jeanne B. Funk,

psychology professor at the University of Toledo in Ohio, has built much of her academic career arguing that violent video games desensitize children to violence, and parents must closely monitor and limit their children's play. But in her many papers on the subject, Funk never suggests parents should play the games themselves. The thought seems never to cross her mind.

Gamer Parents Are Better Parents

Donna and Jack can use games as effective parenting tools because they know and play the games. "George was behind the benchmarks for kindergarten in letter recognition and associated sounds," Donna remembers. "So over spring break he'd sit behind me and I'd use the *World of Warcraft* in-game page function to send him letters and phonics combos. (I have logs that go 'B' - 'f' - 'J' - 'TH.') He was so excited, and he'd yell 'em out. After he could call out the letters really well, I let him sit on my lap and call out mobs I'd go after. He would have to spell the names of the monster before I'd shoot at it. We got killed a lot early on - *WoW* mobs have big fantasy names, weird unfamiliar letter combinations - but he got faster and faster. George's teacher was very

impressed with the progress we made over spring break - which is entirely due to the *WoW* pager function."

Knowing the games is key, though the importance of actually playing them depends on the game type. Donna says, "For an MMOG, I would strongly recommend playing with your kids until you think they're old enough to be alone. That's why we guild carefully, and tell folks we know that our kids are kids. We have friends in-game who can look out for the kids if we aren't online at the moment. Now for an RTS, it's less important to play with them. If you aren't a gamer, that would be painful - but if you know enough to converse intelligently about it, that's great.
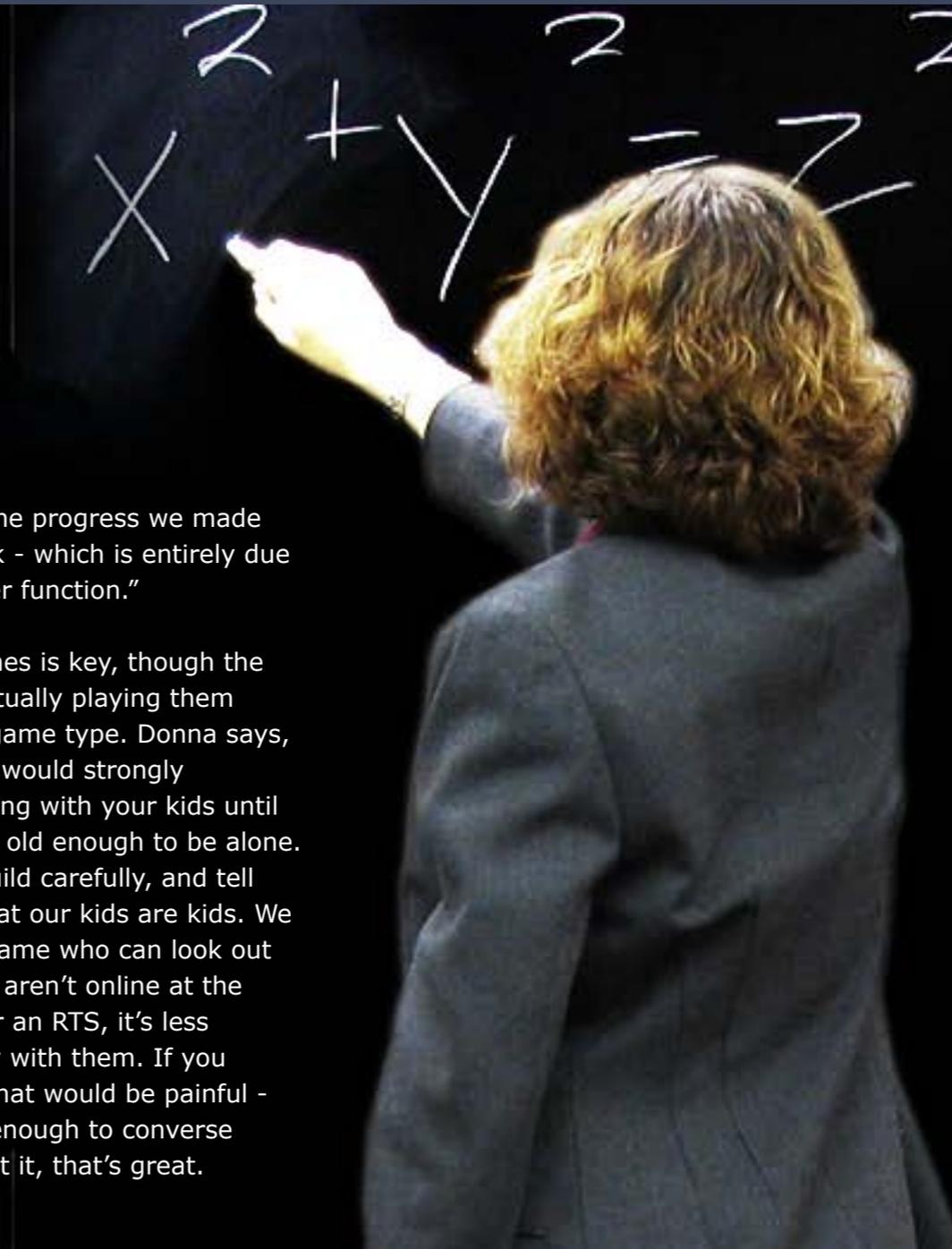
"Games, in my household at least, give new life to the humanities. My kids will know Egyptian dynastic culture because I'll show them that stuff offline once I catch it in-game. Architecture, culture, religion, economics … If you are playing in a virtual world inspired by the real one, you have a great opportunity to make those 'boring' social studies classes interesting.

"Another key point for me centers around 'identity.' My kids have to hold their own, think on their own and be their own individuals in a world that will increasingly rely on the 'virtual.' How you present yourself in a game that you play for six months on a daily basis does have real impact, especially for my kids who are likely to be gaming with future employers or wives. Your real-life maturity and wisdom is (or isn't!) demonstrated in-game. The game makes it easier to be someone you aren't - and if you spend a lot of time being someone else, who are you, really?

"I'm very clear with the kids that their characters in-game are extensions and expressions of themselves. When we played *Black and White*, Harry couldn't be 'evil.' It isn't behavior he should be emulating, or aspiring to be … not as a kid."

If more parents played games, it would expand the audience, and probably the range of subjects publishers could sell. If more people knew games as parenting tools, they could get the politicians to target some other victim. So the industry should get the word out: **Parents who join in their kids' electronic games often become better parents.**

Defining the Dialogue

The side that frames the argument usually wins. As long as media attention focuses on "violent video games making kids more violent," few parents will think of playing the games with their kids. Our worthy task is to elevate the discussion. Some early steps to take:

1. Lobby

First, the industry must quiet the "Hot Coffee" noise while it crafts a new image. Some politicians occasionally take stands on principle, but fortunately, the current anti-game demagogues are routine opportunists. Buying legislators grows more efficient (if not cheaper) with each passing administration. Publishers can shut off the Congressional heat with campaign contributions to the noisiest grandstanders. Ideally, the industry would secure and foster actual government support, in the same way the Korea Culture & Content Agency has partnered with the Korea Game Development Institute industry trade group. Currently an American equivalent seems impractical, but over time …?

2. Sponsor research

As Jonathan L. Freedman of the University of Toronto says in "Evaluating the Research on Violent Video Games," there's far too little formal psychological research into videogames. Freedman cites a meta-analysis paper that identifies "35 research reports that included 54 independent samples of participants. Of these, 22 were published. And of these, only 9 studies dealt with aggressive behavior. In other words, conclusions about whether playing violent video games causes aggressive behavior must be based on nine published experiments. I cannot think of another important issue for

which scientists have been willing to reach conclusions on such a small body of research. Even if the research had been designed and conducted perfectly, there is far too little evidence to reach any firm conclusions. And [...] the research is far from perfect."

This slight foray into research doesn't examine parents who game with their children. We need to hire some postdocs and fund studies.

3. Market!

A good industry-wide marketing strategy and public relations offensive can transform society. It's easy to screw it up, as Hasbro did with its less than thrilling "Family Game Night," but the electronic game world is stronger and more interesting than the Hasbro boardgame line. Hire a PR agency, find a celebrity spokesperson (Vin Diesel! He plays D&D!), and sponsor events and conferences.

Still, changing parenting techniques is hard. "There have been marketing efforts around 'the family that plays together stays together,'" Donna observes. Aside from Hasbro "the same pitch is made for T-ball and peewee football. All of them have trouble. Most messages to that end ('get involved with your kids') are weak at best. Parental involvement is difficult, regardless - which is just tragic.

"I'd work with the notion that in games, you are in control. I'd liken it to Tivo and mobile phones - entertainment you control. Then I'd toss in a higher-level appeal to both parents and kids that says, 'When you get to make the decisions, where do you want to go?'"

Has this industry answered that question for itself? If so, we're ready to start asking parents. It's worth a try.

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.

I confess. I am a videogame junkie. This is not an easy admission to make. Most forty-one year old men have respectable hobbies – ones that involve doing lots of sweaty yard work, building birdhouses or coaching little-league football. They have it easy. No one looks at **them** in askance or gently move their young children behind them during polite conversation. Rather, those gentlemen are considered "normal" and "healthy" by "normal and healthy people." But the elderly videogame guy, now **he's** a weirdo.

Trust me, it's not easy being the decrepit oddball walking into the videogame store or the game section of your local MegaMart. It is very easy to feel guilty using your height and weight to shoulder aside ten-year-olds so you can be the first to try a demo of the latest Xbox release. Bringing along one's children is generally a good way to gain admission to these areas without claiming too much notice. But this advantage is easily forfeited when passersby hear your kids repeatedly whining, "C'mon, Dad! Can we go now?"

But you soon get used to it. When I was younger, I used to believe that one day I would outgrow my love for videogames. After all, I reasoned, what adults play these games for hours on beautiful Saturday afternoons? However, it turned out as I grew older, the games themselves became more sophisticated and engrossing. The result? There was to be no escape from the siren call of electronic tomfoolery.

"HEY, WHO'S THE OLD-TIMER?"

by Glenn Jarrell

Grab a game controller and set your inner action-hero free.

And oh, that call is strong. Most people are simply unaware of what joys and challenges are available in today's crop of games. Folks my age generally think of the games they played as teenagers, and can often recall none better than *Pong* and arcade *Space Invaders*. "Sorry, but I outgrew *Asteroids* about 20 years ago." Which is ultimately their loss - 20-year-old games are as much like modern games as smoke signals are to mobile phones.

No longer do you clumsily maneuver colorless blobs on a fuzzy screen using awkward joysticks. Nowadays, games are controlled by sophisticated ergonomic devices which would have been the joy of any Apollo astronaut. The level of "realism" on your TV screen often rivals that of any fine Pixar movie. You want to drive around the streets of a virtual L.A. stealing cars and/or beating

up crooks? Knock yourself out with a *Grand Theft Auto* game. How about joining a squad of marines on another world fighting aliens? Hyperdrive into *Halo*, baby. Or what if you just like quietly solving difficult puzzles with soothing music and gorgeous scenery? Well, step right up to the land of *Myst*. Whatever your needs from hobbies and entertainment, games can now provide – they've grown up, right along with us.

Plus, being the oldest guy at the party has its advantages. For example, I can simply walk up to the counter and buy any game I want. I don't have to work an extra shift or eat ramen noodles for a whole week. Instant gratification. No trying to sneak "M-rated" games by the store clerk or pining away for that extra-fancy controller for me, pal. And if I want that second (or third) gaming console, I can have right at it. The hard part is coming up with a satisfactory explanation for the spouse. For some reason, she doesn't get quite as excited as I do about new hardware releases.

Games are escapism, pure and simple. No different from plopping down big bucks to see Hollywood's latest two-hour

blockbuster. Unlike a movie, however, you actually take part in the plot and goings-on. And many games last much longer and provide much more enjoyment. Sure, it's great to watch Ahnold blasting bad guys and bandying clever banter, but wouldn't **you** rather do the shootin' and the sassin'? Grab a game controller and set your inner action-hero free.

With that in mind, remember that all of this may come at some personal cost. My advice is to be sure that you have an understanding spouse or significant other. He or she may very much enjoy cuddling up on the sofa for a marathon *Friends* session, but may balk at grabbing a controller and duking it out on an imaginary football field. Videogaming, like all great vices, is best done in moderation.

Glenn Jarrell is a lawyer in Georgia and a gaming Fool. He thinks that nursing homes should have weekly LAN parties.

THE
THIRD
GENERATION

by Spanner

My thirteen-year-old niece is a keen videogamer and for many years (while my rapidly maturing friends all took to playing golf instead of *Final Fight*; having dinner parties instead of getting trashed outside the off license; and talking about mortgage increases instead of *Thundercats*) she has been my Player 2. She was also my first indication that all was not well with the industry when visually impressive, expansive 3-D marvels consistently failed to capture her interest.

Just like her, I can't be bothered exploring every corner and high perch of this week's revolutionary new gaming world (which generally demand feats of phalangeal dexterity so intense they could frustrate a jazz piano playing octopus). For me, videogames are at their finest when played as a participative engagement, not an immersive, solitary expedition into a replacement reality. I realize this is a stereotypical introduction to a benchmark lecture from the University of the Self-Satisfied Middle Aged, but it is also an attitude shared by a substantial part of today's gaming youth.

When I was a lad (and everywhere was all fields and buses were always on time), videogames were severely limited affairs that, at best, roughly approximated their arcade forefathers. I don't think it is unreasonable to say it's only in the last few years that technology has caught up with the immeasurable imagination of the pioneers who first conceived of electronic playthings.

Those brave trail blazers would, in fact, be of my parent's age bracket. They were the fearless campaigners who wandered out into the desert and carved an industry from the sun bleached bones of ex-military technology; they were the First Generation of Creators. What an amazing time that must have been, to invent not only a revolutionary new waste of time, but to give birth to a culture that would dominate their children's lives. It was an altruistic gift to the future, since this new and undiscovered land they founded was not a place in which they would ever find residence, themselves.

Can my generation, the First Generation of Players, claim any such foresight on our way to becoming the new Creators? Perhaps, to some degree, though we cannot claim to have worked for the benefit of the future. Any new worlds we fashioned for the digital age were built for ourselves, and we staked out the waterfront acreage and penthouse apartments before any properties ever went on general sale.

I think our less principled path stems from knowing the video game industry when it was but a starving runt; one we impatiently wanted to feed and see grow. We had a world of comparisons that highlighted the major differences between playing at home and playing in the commercial sector. The arcade was a testing ground for next season's home market, filled with magnificent machines that stood two feet above the player and were unrestrained by memory, graphical or audio limitations. With controls unbounded and huge, enticing intro screens, it was a foregone conclusion that these wonderful monsters could never be caged inside our home computers or consoles. But we desperately wanted to believe we would soon be enjoying their wares without the need for a pocket full of change. Such delightful naivety.

This is where the quest for arcade quality games in the living room began; a cause that was taken up as we matured into the Second Generation of Creators. And I dare to say we succeeded, though in our haste to bottle the raster-light of the arcade and drink deep from the comfort of home, it seems we forgot what we actually wanted. If Douglas Adams were available for comment, I suspect he'd say we never really understood the question.

So where did we go wrong? No one knows more about videogames than the First Players; we were there while the best and the beautiful battled it out for over two decades, yet that enchanting essence has undeniably been mislaid. It seems we missed one vital aspect that was at the core of what our parents set out to achieve: It is not the **game** itself that's important, but **playing** the game. The arcade was more than just a testing ground, it was a place to be with other Players and bask in the iridescent glory of Creation.

The videogame culture has become a technical, sterile showcase of programming abilities where dazzling visual effects and professionally arranged soundtracks have replaced the one aspect that we had taken for granted: participative enjoyment. The evolution of

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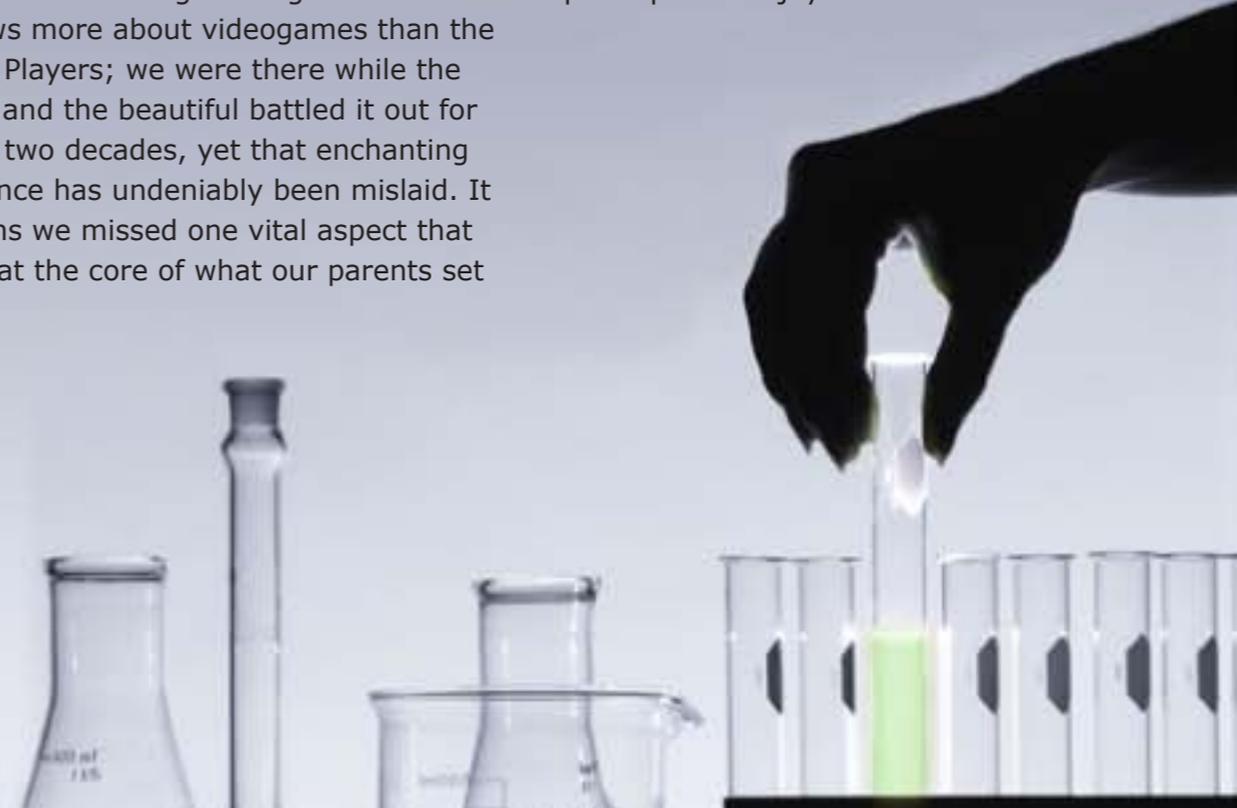
A positive step toward recapturing the pleasures of playing videogames ... diverse. alternative controllers.

the industry did not need explaining to **us,** as we were there when it happened (our heritage was still visible on a clear day), but our **children** have had no such education about the history and importance of the most advanced technology in their lives. It is our duty to ensure that the principles of the videogame culture are not accidentally deleted from history's hard drive.

So, as we stand back and marvel at the breadth of our domain, what can we honestly say our unquestioned answer did for the videogame legacy inaugurated by our parents? All we have given our children, the Second Generation of Players, is a mind numbing overabundance of high-priced, uninspired, 3-D toy adverts and a disheartening apathy for video games in general.

Give me a soap box and an audience large enough and I'll bang on all day about how much better games were when I was young. But in truth, I'm fully aware that I'm looking at it through a rose tinted monitor. There have been some essential achievements in recent years, though often enough these successes are due to the hole into which the industry has dug itself.

One particular attempt to dig upward actually resulted in a positive step toward recapturing the pleasures of playing videogames; that of diverse, alternative controllers. Such abstract regalia as dancing mats, fighting arenas, cameras, light guns, swords, chainsaws and so forth are the core strength of current designers' otherwise barren imaginations. Of all the modern video games my niece and I have endured, none have bridged the gap between the First and Second Generation of Players more than those which employ a proactive, creative method of interacting with the game, and therefore each other. While my wife is in the kitchen chopping carrots, Alex and I are vigorously competing for the virtual carrot chopping record on *EyeToy Play* before moving on to the rabid window washing simulator, wood sawing championships and nail bashing marathon (no dear, I haven't had time to put those shelves up yet).

Ten years ago it was inconceivable to think that a games console would convince us that simulated household chores could be a great wheeze. And it's not just home life that's been infused with bizarre digital merriment.

I've been known to spank the planks pretty hard in nightclubs after one or two shandys, and there's no fear of me ever hogging the rowing machine in a gym, so I prostrate myself at the feet of the mastermind who invented the *Dance Dance Revolution* ("*Dance Dance*" or *DDR*) craze and forged these two seemingly unrelated aspects of modern life into an alloy of pure game playing brilliance. Two inexpensive floor mats with brightly colored arrows, a pumping bass line and a healthy supply of funk are all we need to work up a powerful sweat and set off on a manic trip to videogame Shangri-la. While others are out jogging, staring intensely ahead on a stepping machine, lane swimming themselves into chlorinated oblivion or pumping pieces of iron that have more of a life than they do, we are gettin' on the good foot and offa' that thing with the

help of our hypermedia home gym/ nightclub, the PS2; keeping stress levels as healthy as our racing-snake physiques!

OK, that might be a slight exaggeration, but the truth remains that *Dance Dance* puts the "fun" in "funk." My parents' major concern about videogames, that they nailed me to the chair for a couple of hours a day has been effectively destroyed now that one can work up a sweat on the dance pad. Now, if someone can invent a game that also gets kids to go outside, childhood obesity will be eradicated overnight.

Here, I must make a confession. My snobbish attitude toward the modern gaming scene initially turned my head from such miraculous inventions as the EyeToy and *Dance Dance Revolution*.

Had it not been for a Second Generation Player wanting to try the games whose incessant advertisements were strobed at her between *Pokemon* programs, I would have unwittingly missed out. And as part of our cross-generational exchange, I felt it was **my** turn to educate **her** in the delights of retro gaming. For that, we needed an arcade.

You see, I had to show her the best video game ever. Do you know what that is? The answer might surprise and irritate some of you. Others already know the answer and are just waiting for me to say it. The best game ever is *Double Dragon*. It's no use arguing, because if you disagree, you're wrong.

The **reason** *Double Dragon* is the best game ever is because it introduced cooperative gameplay (plus, you get to pull peoples hair and throw oil barrels at them). Up until this point in 1988, players were pitted against each other, rather than united in gratifying digital violence against an endless onslaught of generic enemies. It was a major turning point in the life of the struggling arcade scene and actively encouraged solidarity in the unsavory types who frequented such places.

The cooperative mode of *Double Dragon* represents the quintessential purpose for playing video games in public: instilling a sense of camaraderie in the players, infusing the atmosphere with a feeling of common purpose and providing an unabashed enjoyment of time in a futile and profitless way. The thrill of simplistic, fast-paced, noisy and brainless (yet sociable) game playing comes not so much from the specific game in question, but from its environment and the interaction – albeit, an often unspoken bond - with the stranger on the machine next to you. None of these experiences can be quantified, packaged or sold to the home market, and **these** are the missing ingredients in the lives of the Second Generation of Players. If we do not show them, they will never fully appreciate the gifts we were given by the likes of Ralph Baer (inventor of *Pong*) and Nolan Bushnell (founder of Atari).

I am fortunate enough to be an electronics engineer, as well as a flamboyant wordsmith, and unhinged enough of mind to have only used that vocation in recent years to build myself a full–size, upright arcade machine housing a PC and more than a few emulators. In truth, this stalwart beast provides more hours of video game

mirth than any previously owned console or computer. It is also the closest I will come to that dream of "an arcade at home" until I become president of the Rank organisation and move the company headquarters to Coral Island on the Blackpool promenade.

There would be nothing to stop me from installing *Doom* or *Quake* or some similarly impressive feat of contemporary technology on my arcade machine, but its purpose is not one of an alternative controller, but of re-enacting the original gaming experience. If your first encounter with *Double Dragon* is on a PC emulator, controlled via the keyboard and displayed in a small window on the desktop, it would be an unsatisfactory experience indeed, though not due to the game's age or technical inferiority.

Alex's introduction to the Lee brothers (the characters from *Double Dragon*) was made through the ostentatious bezel of my arcade companion, and a most rewarding acquaintance it was. She felt the same exhilaration taking on Big Boss Willie's gang as I did at her age when I first played the game, and it has lead to

her develop a very similar attitude as to what constitutes a valuable video game experience as mine own. She gets little enjoyment from locking herself off from the world in order to become immersed in a new reality, and instead thrives on the social interaction of multi-player titles. There is no better way to enjoy an activity than by experiencing it with a companion, or companions, who share a similar passion. This is not a new or alien concept for any of us; it's simply no longer associated with playing videogames.

What do today's players want from videogames? The same thing we wanted at their age and the same thing we still want - fun. This might sound obvious, but there is scant little of it to be found on the shelves at the moment; it has to be dug for and earned, a shared quest between gamers who have become mired in the confused swamp of the

videogame industry. Remember what it is you loved about the games of your past and teach the art of playing them to your children. They will soon be passing along this valuable heritage to the Third Generation of Players.

Spanner has written articles for several publications, including Retro Gamer. He is a self-proclaimed horror junkie, with a deep appreciation for all things Romero.

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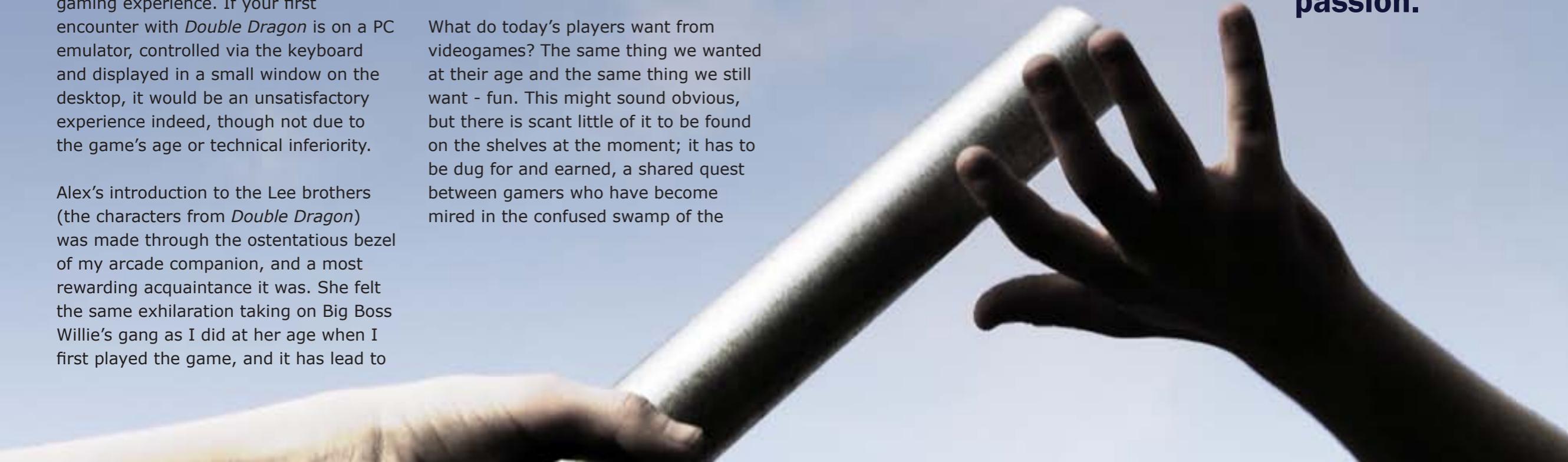
A Missing Link

by Dana Massey

I am not a parent. Yet, as a child of the '80s, with two half-brothers born in the '90s, I do have a unique perspective on the first and second generations of children raised by videogames. Personally, I was one of those who spent far too much time attached to a console or a computer. My brothers, on the other hand, are unique specimens who had no viable gaming outlet until last year. Currently seven and eleven years of age, I changed things on Christmas of 2004 when I bought them a GameCube.

As a child, I was a video game addict. I started on the Nintendo, then got a SEGA Genesis and followed that with a computer I used largely for gaming. Between all these, a friend and I would spend countless hours on his Commodore 64. This upbringing –

despite the repeated admonishments to go outside – led me to my livelihood. Yet, I am the exception. The bulk of kids glued to their controllers will not end up in the game industry. As such, many argue that their time has been wasted. While it remains to be seen whether my brothers will agree with this sentiment, their first console has had a remarkable impact on their life.

For the first ten years of the older brother's life, he had no direct access to a gaming medium. The family computer was aging and in a state of disrepair so, despite his best efforts, gaming was too frustrating to be a true pastime. He would play occasionally at a friend's house or even try to get our old Nintendo to work, but his gaming experience was relatively limited.

The two boys are what you would expect of kids their age. They have friends, they run around, they fight, they laugh and they ride bikes. This has not changed to any great degree since the GameCube entered their lives, and according to their mother Martine, this is due mostly to her direct involvement in their gaming lives. Many of their friends, she says, play games all day long and are truly addicted.

I was most interested in how the addition of a gaming console in a household with two boys, four years
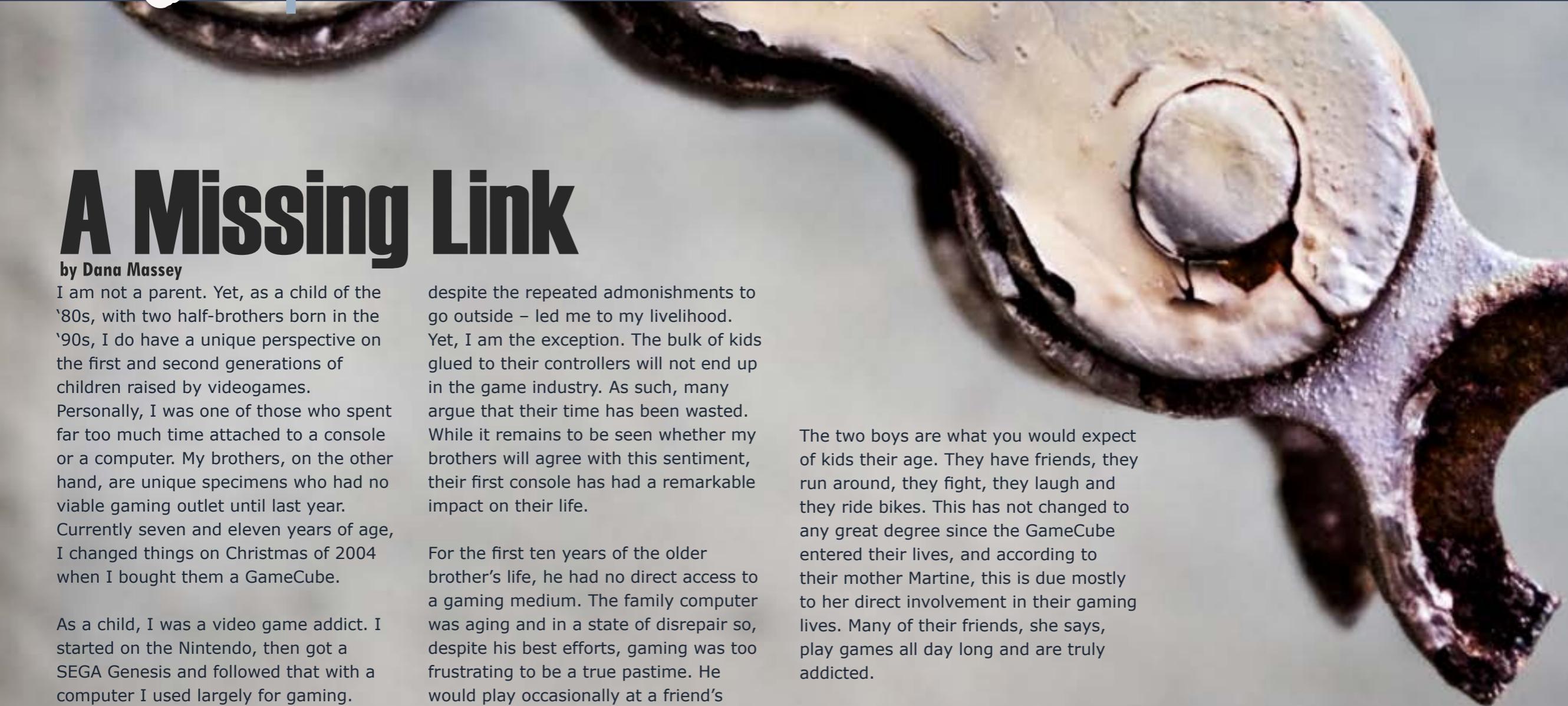
apart in age, has changed the dynamic between them. Typically, kids with that large of a gap tend to go their own way and have their own social circles independent of each other. This is how it was for my sister, who is coincidently also four years older, and me.

"I think they get along better, because they're learning how to share," said Martine. Since the GameCube was introduced into the house, they found a common form of entertainment. They race cars against each other and do a lot of their fighting in *Super Smash Brothers*, rather than the living room floor. "They can do things together," she adds.

Before the GameCube, the younger brother could often be found following his older brother around the house as the elder tried to play with friends or toys. This led to frequent tantrums, as the elder simply wanted to be left alone. The tantrums have virtually disappeared since the introduction of the console. They remain at awkward ages in relation to each other, but the console – as a joint gift – is a common link and they must share.

That said, it has not totally quelled all dissention between the two siblings.

"Sometimes they fight when one thinks the other has been on longer," explains their mother. To cut through this she has strict rules on how much time each of them can play and alternates who gets to play first. The entire process requires a lot of parental investment, but keeps things civil.

My initial concern, when considering the present, was that the age gap would manifest itself in their respective skill levels and make the GameCube extremely frustrating and disheartening for the younger of the two. This has been the case from time to time, but the young one has developed a remarkable tenacity. Last time I was home, the slight seven-year-old won several rounds when playing his brother.

My concern regarding the age difference has also been alleviated by their different tastes. They often play racing or cartoon fighting games together, but the elder takes these games to a new level. They are his passion. The younger brother instead prefers action-adventure. These games are typically single player,

and sometimes a bit difficult for him. Here the different skill levels play to his advantage. If he cannot do it, he fetches his older brother to get him past hard spots in the game. On one occasion, when I was home, I was enlisted to get them by a particularly hard mission in the *Shrek* videogame. Even in single–player games, it has become a bonding tool.

Martine believes that neither of her sons could be classified as addicted. While it is their favorite thing to do, her careful regulation of their time allowed ensures that time spent playing never gets out of hand. And, many times, there are simply a host of other things the boys would rather be doing.

Economically, the GameCube has had remarkably small impact on the house. Things are complicated by virtue of two children – if one gets a game the other must have one – but since its initial purchase, they have only gotten approximately two games each from their parents. That said, it has become a catch-all for family gifts. Anyone who wants to buy the boys a present seems to bring them a videogame - I might be the worst offender in this regard. As a

Even in single–player games, it has become a bonding tool.

result, they have a very healthy collection.

The addition of a console can also act as a motivating factor. One of my earliest memories is being afraid to swim under water. My father had a horrible time trying to teach me to swim, despite growing up on a river. So, one day, he combined my two favorite things. I was a huge fan of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and I loved my Nintendo. Thus, with the promise of a shiny new video game, I learned to swim underwater in a matter of minutes.

Perhaps the positive side of games has flourished in their home because of parental involvement.

But seldom is anything in life all positive. The hot button issue of gaming and the mass media has been how violence affects kids. I am firmly of the opinion that, in the long term, if someone goes on a rampage after playing a game, then the game can no more be blamed than *The Catcher in the Rye* can be for John Lennon's murder. Yet, in the short term, I do believe it can cause some smaller scale problems.

As a child, I was notorious for jumping off furniture and miming ninja kicks after watching *Mighty Morphing Power Rangers*. This practice eventually led to the show being banned in my house. My younger step-brothers demonstrate similar behavior. "I find if they watch too much violence they tend to take it out on each other," notes their mother. Frequently, after a particularly rousing game session, the two come clamoring into the main living room to fight in a way eerily similar to what they have just seen in game. It is play-fighting, and would happen independently of games, but the games give them something specific to imitate. Is this kids being kids or do the games inspire the violence itself, not just the form it takes? It is a tough question that requires more study.

Despite this play-fighting, the addition of a gaming console into my brothers' lives has been more positive than negative. It has improved their sharing, their relationship and given them a pastime that keeps them busy. Perhaps the positive side of games has flourished in their home because of parental involvement. The specific games played are supervised and time spent playing is not unlimited. Like most things, gaming is good in moderation. And whether or not they enjoy playing games themselves, this moderation is perhaps the most important way in which older generations can have an effect on younger players' gaming experience.

Dana "Lepidus" Massey is the Lead Content Editor for MMORPG.com and former Co-Lead Game Designer for Wish.

NEWS BITS

Sony DRM Methods Avoidable with Opaque Tape

Sony's root kit troubles continue to grow. Intrepid users have discovered that Sony's DRM technology can be avoided by placing opaque tape on a specific area on the CD. Readers may remember years back, when Sony's previously touted anti-piracy protection software was rendered useless when users traced a circle around the outsides of CDs with permanent marker.

Jack Thompson Forcibly Removed from Alabama Case, Says Judge

Controversial media lawyer Jack Thompson reportedly asked circuit judge James Moore to be allowed to be removed from the wrongful death case underway in Alabama. But Moore is now saying he denied Thompson's motion and granted the defense's request to revoke "pro hac vice," the legal term for the temporary privilege to practice law in a state where a lawyer doesn't have a license to practice.

While it may seem as though the decision was one of formality, Moore may actually have been attempting to make a statement regarding Thompson's conduct on the case. Moore has gone on to release an 18 page article criticizing Thompson's actions, and has gone as far as to report Thompson to the Disciplinary Commission of the Alabama Bar Association.

Casual Friday

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Intergeneration Education

by Spanner and Alex Spencer

I'm sure Alex (my 13-year-old niece) and I (a tragic, 30-year-old video game expert/snob) are not the only ones to have bridged that gap between the videogame generations, but we **are** the only ones with a soap box from which to shout about it, so here's our run down of the best games to help old people get back in touch with the gaming scene and for whippersnappers to learn about games the way they used to be.

Bubble Bobble
PS2 (as part of *Taito Legends*)
by Alex Spencer

Bubble Bobble is a good choice to play with a friend or a relative who just isn't into the more violent or serious kind of games, and is a good way to just sit and relax together. You play as either Bub or Bob who are two cute, bubble-blowing dragons. In the game, you have to catch things like robots, ghosts and other peculiar creatures by capturing them inside a bubble. As they float off toward the ceiling getting angry and red-faced, you must chase after them and pop their bubble before they escape, from which

you gain points. Points mean lives, so you need to be fast and make sure you share the goodies with the other player. Touching one of the enemies without a bubble means you loose one of your three lives, although it's worth it at first to see your dragon go all dizzy and fall over.

There are one hundred levels in total which keep getting harder, but each level is nice and short, so you can play it if you have only a few minutes to fill. Spanner might blow a fuse at this one, but I think *Bubble Bobble* is as good on the console as it is on the arcade machine, so I really recommend *Taito Legends*.

Final Fight
Coin-Op
by Spanner

Remember how *Double Dragon* turned out to be the best game ever? Well, it was in a photo finish with *Final Fight*.

Originally intended to be *Street Fighter II*, Capcom released *Final Fight* in 1989

in its own right when test audiences complained about its lack of similarity to the original *Street Fighter*. The historical relevance of *Final Fight* is it's introduction of the "attack" button to the beat 'em up genre, whereby the player no longer had to learn button and joystick combinations to perform the game's attack sequences, they just pounded rabidly on a single button and the game engine filled in all the Jackie Chan type moves.

Although the (S)NES has its share of *Final Fight* conversions (good ones, too), this is definitely one for playing on the arcade floor. The thumping bass and cracking bones need to be experienced first-hand through the tactility of excessive audio volume, while an irresponsible disregard for the cabinet and its controls provide a warrior with exactly the kind of aggression relief their overworked psychiatrist might recommend.

Tetris
Plug'n'Play TV game
By Alex Spencer

Tetris is another oldie-but-goodie, that I'm sure doesn't need an introduction. I first played a one-player version on

Kirsty's (that's my auntie and Spanner's wife) original Game Boy. Spanner recently bought one of the "plug directly into your TV"-type *Tetris* games that allows two players to battle it out. He **said** it was for Kirsty...

In the TV game, the different shaped bricks still fall from the top for you to fit into the spaces below, only this **two**-player version allows you to make it a real block war. Completing a single line, as you might do more often when playing on your own and just want the points, doesn't have any effect on the other player. Completing two, three or four (**Tetris**!) lines at once **adds** the same number of lines to the bottom of your opponent's pile, taking them closer to the top of the screen.

There are several different types of gameplay available, some that offer more of a challenge than others. This game is enjoyable because you really get to bond with the other player; since it is so simple to play, you can chat while playing.

Quest for the Rings
Philips G7000 (AKA Magnavox Odyssey²)

by Spanner
The pinnacle of the G7000's gaming delights came in the form of the "Master Strategy" series; a combination of video and board games. Of the three released, *Quest for the Rings* was undoubtedly the finest.

Based on the J.R.R.Tolkien book, the game used a separate board to determine what format the on-screen battles would take. As the players made their way along the winding path of the board game, they would encounter castles containing all manner of fantasy nasties protecting a magic ring. The real genius of this game was requiring the players to choose their teams carefully when entering a battle. Often, it was necessary for one of the players to use special abilities to fight off enemies while the other used powers to get the ring. Choose the wrong players or fail to work as a team and the prize was easily lost.

A great game for those long winter evenings, and although it was technically a two-player game, any number of heroes could happily share the burden forming a triumphant Fellowship all of their own. Historical gaming at its finest

with nothing a modern system could add to its wonderful, cooperative gameplay.

The Sims 2
PC
By Alex Spencer
The Sims 2 is technically a one-player game, but it is good to play with someone else as there are aspects appealing to the older player which kids might not be as good at, and vice versa.

The day-to-day running of your Sims' lives doesn't seem to be as interesting to older players, but making bigger decisions about their lives, or building and decorating a new house, seems to catch their interest. Perhaps adults enjoy it because it's like living out one of those "home makeover" type of TV programs!

The Sims can be a very long game, so it's ideal for those rainy afternoons when you want to go somewhere where the sun is always shining. It can also be a good way to get rid of a bad mood, as you can take out your frustrations on your Sims' families it can be a laugh seeing what weird things you can make an unhappy Sim do!

Dance Dance Revolution
Coin-Op
by Spanner

A short while ago, I noticed a crowd gathered around a couple of odd looking, behemoth games machines that required the players to strut their funky stuff on floor mounted controllers. What was particularly unusual was how the crowd were all dancing along, practicing routines until their turn on the dance floor came around. An entire entourage of prospective pop stars was acting out detailed choreographies in the middle of an arcade with impeccable timing; all expertly taught by a video screen and a quid's worth of credits.

I realized I'm not quite the hot stepper I assumed myself to be, although once the rising arrows on the screen are associated with aesthetic step routines, the patterns encoded within the music began to present themselves. The purpose of this game, which makes it quite unique, is not one of competition with the computer but harmony with the music and the step arrangements contained within. When two gamers, and a crowd of trained onlookers, successfully unite in a composition of refined dexterity, I can't help but feel that a simple harmony of two players has been transcended to also include the game, its elaborate cabinet and the rest of the arcade; participative gameplay in the extreme!

EyeToy Play
PS2
by Spanner

In time, this gadget will prove to be a defining moment in videogame history, as it single-handedly discovered a way to get players out of their square eyed atrophy and start earning – **physically** earning – their points. Half an hour on *EyeToy Play* and a lazy person (ahem) will feel the effects for a couple of days. Of course, the annoying side effects of getting exercise while playing your video games is nothing compared to the hilarity of watching your grandmother beating imaginary drums with all the passion and vigor of an African tribesman.

The EyeToy deliberately allows the fun to be provided by the **players** rather than the **played**. This kind of quiet, background genius is a rare thing indeed and should not be missed by anyone who enjoys games, video or otherwise. It's the perfect way to get fit, have fun and

worry your neighbors in one neat package.

If you ever find yourself in a mental institution, however, be sure not to use an EyeToy as part of your therapy. Should the doctor see you playing it from outside the window (just as your neighbors might), he'll double your Thorazine and move you to the secure unit.

EyeToy Play (so great, we've reviewed it twice!)
PS2
by Alex Spencer

EyeToy Play is just great because it's so unlike any other type of game and places you right on the screen. I **was** going to say it's best to play with people who don't get embarrassed seeing themselves on television, but actually it adds a lot to the enjoyment when it's someone who feels really silly jumping up and down and waving their arms about.

This game is hard work and is ideal when you want some exercise or you want to relieve stress from the day. *EyeToy Play* is a multi-player game, so it's perfect when the whole family comes around for

a visit (and you feel like embarrassing them). The games are all quite short, so no one gets left out of play for very long and there is a variety of games so eventually everyone finds something they are good at, whether it's sprinting down the race track, dodging spotlights, heading footballs or smashing bricks.

Because it's so much fun, you don't realize how much hard work you're doing, so it is a brilliant way to get fit. If you have young children or someone in your family who doesn't normally like to play videogames, *EyeToy Play* is ideal as the games are very simple, don't use ordinary controllers and can be played by anyone willing to jump about the room waving their arms like an idiot. ![E]

Alex Spencer is a teenager with about twenty five years of video game experience under her belt, and a healthy supply of old Yorkshire sass to boot.

Spanner has written articles for several publications, including Retro Gamer. He is a self-proclaimed horror junkie, with a deep appreciation for all things Romero.

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:

"What traditional games does your family play at holiday gatherings?"

Allen Varney, "When Gamers Breed"
Snipe, Scream, Weep and Seethe.

Dana Massey, "A Missing Link"
I come from a family of chess players. My two brothers, my father and I often play several games over the course of the holidays.

Spanner, "The Third Generation" and "Intergeneration Education"
We like a good murder for the holidays, with Cluedo. I'm a particular fan, since my name sake's one of the murder weapons! There's a worrying thrill, but a

thrill none the less, when you find yourself inside the black envelope.

Glenn Jarrell, "Hey, Who's the Old-timer?"
Traditional holiday family games? Let's see. Like most dysfunctional families, we usually play Seething Resentment, Barely Repressed Loathing, High Tension and Awkward Loaded Silences. We also play Scrabble.

Joe Blancato, Contributing Editor
Our family get-togethers include timeless games such as "Bitch about Bernie Williams or Alex Rodriguez," where loving

family members square off on different sides of the room and try to diagnose the Yankees' problems. Another variant is "Bitch about George Bush and/or Ronald Reagan."

JR Sutich, Contributing Editor
After being banned from the family Trivial Pursuit League for using performance enhancers (I read every book I could as a child), my family turned to Pictionary and Scruples. Every Scruples question involving sex or money was directed at me, and I still

think that my artistic rendering of the word "dictator" was in no way vulgar.

Julianne Greer, Executive Editor
I grew up playing bridge with my family and last Thanksgiving, there were multiple nights where we stayed up past 3:00 a.m. playing. Although, in recent years, Cranium has made quite a showing. Hearing my Dad hum "Love Shack" and watching my Mom's extremely phallic blind-drawing of "lipstick" likely had something to do with that.