

the Escapist



Casual Friday

One Night in Arathi
SICK OF HEALING

MEET THE TEAM!

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EDITOR'S NOTE

by Julianne Greer

Last week, *The Escapist* discussed one of the darker spots of gaming – addiction. We discussed what happens, why it happens and even a little about how to cope. And spurred by that issue, I thought about the reasons gamers might be susceptible to addiction, beyond those discussed. I came up with another we had not discussed: Gamers are a passionate bunch.

Before you disagree, hear me out. Yes, they are often somewhat cynical, but they carry their cynicism to an extreme. And have you seen a flame war on a message board? When they don't like someone or something, gamers show it in such poetic language as to make Hallmark card writers green with envy. Of course, this passion shows itself in many of our abilities to become swept up in a game, losing track of time and "Earthly needs."

But this passion is not all bad. In fact, many people have improved the lives of others or felt the positive outreach of gamer passion. This week's issue, "For Great Justice!" focuses on this positive

passion, both in game and out. Shannon Drake talks with the guys over at *Penny Arcade* about Child's Play, the charity they started to help bring a little joy to sick children. Shawn Williams tells of gamers who stood by his side, literally and financially, when his family was rocked by a frightening diagnosis. And Spanner discusses what it means "To Be a Hero" and the appeal of games where we can do just that. Find these articles and more in this week's issue of *The Escapist*.

Cheers,



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor: I read your latest issue, "Walton's World," and was amazed and impressed by the level of empathy and understanding it conveyed about retail sales and employees. So much, in fact, that I found myself nodding in agreement and shaking my head in

disgust right along with your journalists as they detailed their experiences, their fears, and their hopes for an industry struggling more than ever with mass consumerism and mainstream ethics.

My sympathies come from my own year in retail. I watched a very similar conversion happen as my beloved big-box bookstore went from a comfortable place of reading and enlightenment to a dreary place of printed paper and bottom line. I struggled against management and corporate pressure who tried to track our sales. I watched as my section, my baby, was gutted in the name of streamlining stock so that only sellable items were carried. Single copies of a book that you might sell, if the right person happened to come calling, in the next six-months-to-a-year, just weren't worth keeping in the store anymore. Despite that people did come calling and were then frustrated there was nothing for them, even though we were large enough to have something, anything, on their desired topic.

It is heart breaking to see shelves emptied of resources and life while the Next Big Thing (with the inevitable Famous Person Stamp of Approval) fills

shelves and tables and aisles. But I have hope yet.

The internet is becoming a place where the unsung are heard, and the unknown can be found. With the power of bloggers harnessing a truly free press, and everyone promoting what is truly worthwhile and enjoyable, there may yet be a place for games (and books, and music) that will never make it to the front rack of your local emporium. It will be interesting to watch, as a gamer and consumer, over the next several years as retail flounders against big box mega stores, and internet shops continue to pursue a friendly familiarity once found in your local mall. I, for one, will be lying in wait to do my part to change the way games (and media in general) are made, sold and played. I will be looking for the light at the end of the tunnel.

A venue such as yours hints at that light. You've touched on issues right at the heart of this struggle. You've shown insight into the revolutions that are happening in the minds and hearts of gamers. You've written on all sides of gamer issues, both for and against. You've shown an empathy for the mainstream and those just discovering

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the world of gaming. Keep writing, there are more people that need to hear what you have to say.

Duncan Munro

To the Editor: As an original supporter of Mr. Crawford's article on girls and games, I became extremely irritated by Doug Inman's letter lambasting it. I am a fellow life-sciences student, and while I may not have agreed with all the details in Crawford's article, I thought it was exemplary in showing how evolutionary psychology could be applied to various issues in gaming.

In the article, Crawford takes a defensive tone precisely because of criticisms like those of Mr. Inman. After all, after directly attacking the citation of "Why is Sex Fun?" he says that authors should choose citations written by actual PhDs in biology. Hypocrisy can only describe this digital faux pas, for Jared Diamond, the author of the aforementioned book has a PhD. in Physiology from Cambridge University. Geoffrey Miller has a PhD from Stanford. I will agree with one thing Mr. Inman said: an inclusion of Richard Dawkins as a citation would have improved the article.

J. Azpurua

To the Editor: I find it a bit odd that reader "John" [from last week's Letters section] says we need to accept each other, and come together under one title ... while he already critiques a "seperate" group, or sub-division under said title, and then places his own ideas onto that sub-group.

John **is** right. But he needs to more carefully choose his words if he wishes to proclaim his position out loud. If you play videogames, you are in **some** way, a gamer. I saved my birthday money in Kindergarten and bought an NES. Back then *MegaMan 2* cost you your **immortal soul** (I have a receipt for \$72 at The Toy Works, owned by K*B Toys) and I love that game, I have a large NES collection and even larger SNES and Genesis collections. I'm as Old School as I really need to be. My friends and relatives owned the Atari 2600 units, I played *Combat* for hours, and I was my own version of Indiana Jones with *Pitfall*. I even enjoy text based adventures and have a black T-shirt which simply states <GRUE> </Grue>. If that's not "classic" and "old school," then I don't really know what is.

And on the other hand I have an Xbox 360. I'm currently playing *Condemned*. I played *Halo 2* almost every night for two to four hours for over a **year**. I really enjoy *Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, and still drop by a server on occasion. I'm really looking forward to playing *Call of Duty 2*.

I don't think I'm special, and that's the point I'm trying to make here. John is right. We're gamers. We're gamers that like puzzle games, we're gamers that like platformers, we're gamers that like to compete against other gamers in the online arena. We're gamers like my girlfriend, who claims up and down all day long that she is not a gamer, but for the past two weeks hasn't talked about **anything** except *The Sims 2* and the *Nightlife* expansion pack that my mother and I got her for Christmas

You're a gamer. I'm a gamer. You don't have to like it, but eventually, you're going to have to accept it.

Will



Child's Play:

THE TAI CHI APPROACH

by Shannon Drake

Like early explorers, Jerry "Tycho Brahe" Holkins and Mike "Jonathan Gabriel/Gabe" Krahulik hacked their way into the heart of darkness at the core of the early-era internet. Deep in the comedy jungle, they built an empire and called it *Penny Arcade*. *Penny Arcade* used a simple, powerful combo of an actually-funny webcomic and wandering updates from Tycho, chronicling everything from John Romero's latest shenanigans to Gabe's love of *Barbie Horse Adventures*. The sense of humor displayed in the comic is usually sharp, almost always caustic and frequently crosses into the just-wrong-but-still-hilarious territory that made them famous.

So, it sometimes comes as a surprise when people find out the same guys who run a comic featuring a drunken DivX player and a juicer with a lust for the supple flesh of virgin oranges, also happen to be the founders of a children's charity. I was able to get in touch with Mike and Jerry, and got the inside story on Child's Play, how it got started and where it's going.

According to Mike, Child's Play started with an idea. He explains, "Originally, we had these old videogame consoles laying around. Everybody has a Super Nintendo or a Genesis, and we sort of thought, 'Boy, it'd be cool if we could give these old consoles to kids who could really use them, you know, kids in hospitals.' And after we looked into that, we found out that these hospitals don't want anything used. The kids are not in the sort of situation where they can have germs or anything like that around them. The hospitals are really, really strict about only accepting brand new toys, in their boxes, that sort of thing. So the idea sorta morphed into, 'Well, let's just make Wishlists on Amazon and let gamers purchase brand new toys and games for these kids.'"



The real catalyst for Child's Play was the media's wall to wall portrayal of gamers as school shooters waiting to happen.

Not all was kisses and bunnies and pure philanthropy. The real catalyst for Child's Play was the media's wall-to-wall portrayal of gamers as school shooters waiting to happen.

Jerry explains, "Well, initially, we were actually sort of mad. I think that we'd seen a few articles around that time that we thought were especially specious connecting violent behavior and videogames and gamers and dangerous activities and so forth." Just as a

refresher, 2003 was the year of the Protect Children from Videogame Sex and Violence Act of 2003, a grandstanding title capstoning a year full of hysterical headlines. Both Holkins and Krahulik wanted to do something positive to counter this portrayal, as he explained.

"And so, we wanted to create something that ... sort of like the Tai Chi approach. Obviously, we'd been running the site for a while, and I was more than happy to

continue saying bad words. That was going to be how I was gonna change the world. But it occurred to us, if we want people to think differently about people who play games and the companies that make games, well, we need to do different things. It's a very straightforward idea, but it seemed revolutionary to us at the time. That was basically our genesis." That first year, Child's Play donations went on to overwhelm Jerry's house, as gamers worldwide sent in boxes and boxes

beyond what either of them had envisioned.

While anger at the media began it, it swiftly evolved into something greater. He finishes the story, "That really isn't a part of it anymore. It's like, after the first year, and it was so successful, it seemed clear to us that people just wanted a focus, that there were a lot of people that wanted to do this sort of thing. But they needed a focus. Sort of like a rally point. And that was just

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something that we ended up providing. Now, it's the way something like this should be. It's a fairly straightforward, almost entirely pure altruism-type effort. But when it started, it came from a place of anger, like many things that we do at *Penny Arcade*."

Speaking of *Penny Arcade*, I posit it'd be easy to see a contradiction between the guys that drew Jesus throwing up the metal horns and the guys working tirelessly to promote a charity. Are others as surprised to find guys known for a twisted sense of humor so focused on doing good?

"The last few times people have asked us about it, that question almost always comes up," Jerry says, hesitating as he wrestles with the answer. "I don't really have an excellent retort. It definitely is sort of ... there is an incongruity there. That's true. I don't have a great answer for it, other than to say that just because we are, you know, bad people, that doesn't really absolve us of our responsibility in that way. Just because

we're people that have a strange sense of humor, that doesn't mean that we don't have to do our part in other social ways." We both observe it's kind of weird. "Yeah, it is weird. I think it's weird, too! I think we have to sort of set that aside and try to create positive outcomes, essentially."

Creating positive outcomes is what Child's Play does, marshalling an army of fans to get games and money into the hands of sick kids. Mike quotes me a figure of \$590,000, which includes hundreds of thousands of dollars in toys from Amazon, as well as \$130,000 in cash donations, including some big donations from major corporate donors like Microsoft, Bungie, Valve, Cerulean Studios and Epic. I'm interested in who does the giving on an individual level, speculating they're probably getting a lot of first-time givers.

Jerry responds, "Yeah, I agree. I think that we must be tapping into something, like I said before. Something that was already there, but just didn't have a

muster point. Because I think there's a lot of people who give to Child's Play that don't give to other charities, that don't give to charity in general. And I think that there's a couple reasons for that. I think that it isn't as anonymous as a lot of charitable giving tends to be. Like you can give to an umbrella organization and then it goes into a pot and other people determine what that money does."

I observe that seeing a kid with cancer playing a game you bought is much more of an incentive than reading about the head of a charity getting a massive salary for administrative stuff. "I think the idea that there are no administration fees, all the money, all the toys, everything goes right to the kids," Jerry says. "I think that's another big reason that we saw so many donations. I think this year was a really good example and sort of proved that idea, because everyone was talking about donation fatigue. There were so many places to give to and so many catastrophes this year that people said this was going to be a bad year for holiday season giving

and that just was not our experience at all. This was, by far, our most successful year ever."

Mike chimes in with a couple more reasons Child's Play might appeal to the routinely skeptical gamer crowd. "You purchase a specific, a game that you want. You're buying a very specific item and that's being sent directly to the organization, directly to the hospital of your choice." Again, appealing to people who might not be inclined to give a check to a faceless organization. Jerry adds, "And a lot of people can give in their area."

Both actually seemed intent on keeping themselves out of the spotlight as much as possible, using *Penny Arcade* to promote the charity, but not using the charity to promote themselves. "We don't go back for some kind of victory lap" summarizes the discussion on that topic.

Being the guys behind *Penny Arcade* does have a few downsides. A handful of hospitals have refused their assistance



This was, by far, our most successful year ever.

because of *Penny Arcade's* brand of humor. Those that do accept, and more than 20 accepted, aren't always aware of what they're getting into. Jerry quips, "They didn't know it would be a semi," as we talk, referring to the truckload of gifts - and the full-time person needed to unpack them - Seattle Children's Hospital received in Child's Play's first year.

Their plan for Child's Play's future is simple. Keep on adding more hospitals, collecting more stuff and tweaking the system so it works better. They plan to continue letting the charity remain a separate enterprise since, as Jerry says, "I don't like the idea that the amount of good I can accomplish is limited by JPEGs that I upload. That's frustrating to me. But in a couple of years, I don't think that'll be a concern." To that end, they've been letting the unsung heroes of Child's Play, like Mike Fehlauer, Robert Khoo and Kristin Lindsay take on the running of the charity, while they stick to

using their popularity to promote it and whatever crazy ideas they come up with next.

Talk of crazy ideas and the future brings us to their next enterprise, which is still hazy, but very exciting all the same. Right now, they're throwing around the idea of a *Penny Arcade* Scholarship, which should debut this year. Jerry and Mike haven't worked out all the details yet, but with one of the most popular sites on the Web doing the promoting, it should be a success. More importantly, both seemed pretty pumped to be working on something that was a Good Cause, proving you can have an aesthete's appreciation for fine dick jokes and still be a good person.

[COMMENTS](#)

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



Ask Not What Your Game Can Do For You...

by Shawn Williams

A History Of Communities

Gamers exist in communities. Whether we're grouped by the faction we're a part of, the server we play on, the game we play, the genre of game we play – or some combination thereof – we exist as part of a community. We joke about it, make fun of the people that believe in such things and perhaps even dismiss it openly.

But, as games continue to become more complex, so do our interactions. Growing up, I could count on one hand the number of my peers that owned the same gaming system I did (ah, Fairchild, how I miss you). As time went on, gaming became more and more common. I would meet like-minded

people at "cart-swaps," meetings of console gamers in the area where we would swap a game we'd grown tired of for a fresh (albeit slightly used) game we could waste hours upon. With the home computer, the BBS took the place of many of our cart-swaps, and although we'd still meet to trade games (now on floppy disks, and not always "used" – more like "bootlegged"), we still knew one another and took pleasure in being in the company of like-minded individuals. Our "area" might have grown a bit larger, but most interactions were still what we'd consider "nearby."

When the almighty internet arrived on the scene, we were no longer interacting with people even remotely nearby. Our

interactions grew to involve people all over the world. You might be arguing about the effectiveness of the Overload button in *System Shock* with someone from another continent in a news group, hunting WADs for *Doom* through Usenet, playing a favorite MUD or just chatting with friends in ICQ.

When popular MMOGs hit the scene, gamers were already familiar with the concept of "community," but such a concept suddenly became much more relevant. Instead of people simply sharing the same interests as you, these people were now participating in your shared "world" and facing the same challenges as you – and sometimes **they** were the challenges you faced.

More Than Neighbors

The first MMOG community I became a part of was in *Asheron's Call*, in late 1999. I wrote about my (admittedly pathetic) attempts to be a viable combatant on the player vs. player server, Darktide, under the penname Kwip. My stories earned me a bit of recognition in the game, and I gained a number of friends through my mis-adventuring. Even outside of the game, I would often take the time to correspond with people through email or message boards. They'd offer playing advice, I'd reply with tales of abject failure. My girlfriend, Becky (now my wife), became a regular figure in my stories as Kwipette, and we were often joined by poor souls who were convinced **they** would be the ones to show me how to level properly.

Corresponding with these friends became an important part of my daily routine, and I spent more time talking to them than I did talking to my neighbors. I had a friend in France and could name each of her cats, but didn't know my neighbor's first name. We exchanged holiday cards with people we had never met in person, and our neighbor refused

to unchain her door when we dropped off homemade Christmas cookies.

Were the cookies that bad, or was it simply that our geographical neighbors had less in common with us than people who lived 3,000 miles away?

A Diagnosis, And A Community Responds

In mid-2000, Becky was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). Multiple sclerosis is a chronic, often disabling disease of the central nervous system. Symptoms may be mild, such as numbness in the limbs, or severe - paralysis or loss of vision.

Becky was 24 years old. I'm not saying there's a great age to be diagnosed with such a disease, but allowed to choose, I think most people would choose later in life. **Much** later.

We struggled to come to terms with this throughout 2000. When 2001 hit, we made up our minds we were going to take a pro-active stance. Becky wasn't going to sit around and see what happened, she was going to fight back the only way we really knew how - she created an MS Walk team. Together, with

a few of our friends and family, we formed a small team and set about raising funds.

Most of the friends I had were already signed up on our team, so I turned to my co-workers for donations. That earned me a whopping \$20. This was better than nothing, of course, but if I was going to hit my goal of \$100, I would need more help.

I talked about it with Becky, and with her blessing, I posted a story on my website about what we were going through. Then, I fired off a quick email to the *Asheron's Call* fansites, letting them know I had updated with an important story. Saying a loud prayer, I went to bed that night, hoping it would be well received in the gaming community. After all, here I was - a notorious goofball - suddenly turning to them with this serious and sad story.

I tossed fitfully that night, wondering if I had just opened our personal lives up to mockery of outrageous proportions. I dreamt of hitting not only my goal of \$100, but maybe even - gasp - **\$200!**



The next morning, I checked my pledges. I was already over \$3,000



The next morning, I checked my pledges. I was already over \$3,000 – including a \$1,000 pledge. To say I was shocked is a bit of an understatement. Letters poured in – people who had a family member suffering from MS, or knew a friend with MS, or just had similar experiences with another debilitating disease. When we attended player gatherings, people would come up to us to offer their support, share stories with us, ask us questions about our experiences. They would **get involved** with us. The next year, I began playing *Dark Age of Camelot*, and when I posted another request for pledges, they answered just as loudly as the AC community.

Year after year, these people continued to be involved. Not only were there the AC and the *DAoC* communities – whom I considered “our” communities, games we regularly played – there was the sudden interest of gamers outside of those games. Wil Wheaton linked to us. Tycho and Gabe from *Penny Arcade* posted a link to us, giving away prizes to people who pledged.

Our community – gamers – got involved. More than our neighbors, more than our

parishes, more than our companies, our fellow gamers were there when we needed them. It wasn’t a matter of money. It was an outpouring of support, of concern, of **hope**.

Support For Today And Tomorrow

At the 2005 Walk last year, I walked without my beloved Kwipette for the first time. She was bedridden, in the beginning of what would be a four-month ordeal, as MS took hold of her body and caused serious neurological damage.

I walked that day, feeling more alone than I had ever been in my life. I took every step, fighting back tears, as my thoughts kept shifting back to my wife, unable to do so much as lift her head without becoming violently ill from the lesion that had formed on her brain.

But at my side were my fellow gamers. A number of local (and not-so local) gamers had traveled to Lancaster, PA to join our team. We carried sponsorship from Three Rings Design, Inc. and Monolith Productions, Inc., who both took an active role in helping us get more pledges. Developers from Mythic Entertainment and Turbine, Inc. were **at**

my side, taking time out from their incredibly busy schedules to walk with us.

They are my friends, my monarchs, my guild members, my heroes, my enemies and (quite rarely) my victims. We share little in common, except the love of moving around pixels on a computer. But when I swallowed my pride, faced my fear and put a call for help out to the world, they are the ones that answered.

Is my situation an exception? Not at all. In fact, we rate relatively low in the field of gaming charities. Child’s Play, perhaps the most famous gaming charity of all, has raised over a **million dollars** in donated toys and money, in just three holiday seasons.

We are gamers. We are a community. And sometimes, we do good deeds.

[COMMENTS](#)

Shawn “Kwip” Williams is the founder of N3 (NeenerNeener.Net), where he toils away documenting his adventures as the worst MMO and pen-and-paper RPG player in recorded history.

Comrades in Cheap

by Pat Miller



Appearances can be deceiving.

This is especially true on the internet, of course; there are plenty of decent-seeming people lurking in the network shadows who just as soon as you turn your back would prey upon your hard drive's contents in search of whatever it is - passwords, credit card numbers, videos you *promised* would go no further than you and your significant other, whatever - that would bring them a few bucks.

And yet here I am, conducting a magazine interview via instant messenger with a fellow whom I contacted via a forum private message because I don't have his real name, phone number or email address. Apparently, he's in Tokyo. We're chatting about a particular corner of cyberspace traversed by all manner of obscure screen names, where people post cryptic messages like "TRU 12/20 YMMV" and engage in various black-market transactions hidden from prying eyes, where appearances are deceiving in a very different way. Credit card

theft? Stealing personal information? Software piracy? Nope. These guys form a gamer network that spans across the United States, working together in the name of - what else? - cheap games. Welcome to CheapAssGamer.com.

"Cheap Ass Gamer was inspired by [general bargain site] bensbargains.net," David Abrams tells me. "One of my friends used to keep emailing me deals that he found there and I got hooked." David, known as "CheapyD" to his fellow Cheap Ass Gamer ilk ("CAGs"), started Cheap Ass Gamer in May 2003 as a side project to his normal nine-to-five job. "The problem was, there wasn't enough videogame deals to satisfy me. And when there were videogame deals, they just got lumped in with everything else," he continues, "I found myself searching the online retailers for videogame deals and then decided to try and make my own website." Two and a half years later, David has moved to Tokyo with Mrs. CheapyD and made videogame bargain hunting his full time job.

But, if Cheap Ass Gamer's deal news page is the Bat-Signal for Cheap Ass Gamers, it is the forums that constitute its metaphorical Batcave. While CheapyD still finds his share of deals, and retailers will occasionally come to Cheap Ass Gamer to give him the inside scoop, the majority of deal news comes from the Cheap Ass Gamer bulletin boards, where a community of like-minded individuals congregate to form a network of cheap ass informants capable of locating videogame deals that even CheapyD himself couldn't find.

Deal information ranges from a simple heads-up on a local videogame store sale to a detailed list of clearance games leaked from anonymous retailer employees at national chains like Toys 'R' Us, Circuit City and Sam Goody. Their sources are impeccable. It's not an uncommon occurrence for CAGs to be sighted skulking the gaming aisles of their local Best Buy with a list of cheap ass games in hand or an obscene stack of games at the checkout aisle, of course. But neither is it uncommon for them to know exactly what games are on clearance for \$9.99 **before the employees themselves do.**

Their methods are just as ruthless as their information is reliable, too; every trick in the book is used to make sure that they don't pay a penny more than they have to. A recent Target holiday catalog erroneously published the price of the Nintendo DS as a mere \$99, \$30 cheaper than the normal retail price. However, while the average Joe stomped angrily to the store manager's office to wave a printout of the mistaken advertisement in his or her face to varying degrees of success, savvy CAGs were found at Circuit City and Best Buy with the same Target ad in hand, requesting a price-match, and, in most cases, getting it.

While the average Internet-savvy gamer may have showed up at the December Toys 'R' Us clearance sale to pick up *Resident Evil 4* for \$10, CAGs were there *two days before the sale* to pick up all the items that were to be marked for clearance, and returned during normal sale days to get the price difference refunded, allowing them to snag the titles they wanted at the prices they wanted without having to deal with the sale-day rush.

A man with dark hair and blue eyes is peering over the top edge of a black laptop. His hands are resting on the keyboard. The laptop screen shows a website with a dark background and green text. The text on the screen is a large, bold, green headline that reads: "Deal information ranges from a simple heads-up on a local videogame store sale to a detailed list of clearance games leaked from anonymous retailer employees." The website's browser address bar shows "Cheap Ass Gamer: Cheap Video Game Shopping, Video Game Sales and Video Game Deals, LLC".

Deal information ranges from a simple heads-up on a local videogame store sale to a detailed list of clearance games leaked from anonymous retailer employees.

There is an honor among cheap asses.

No doubt, the temptation to abuse this cheap ass power runs strong in mere mortals. Indeed, I found at my first game clearance sale, thoughts of my own gaming needs were brushed aside in favor of money signs and thoughts of eBay. The thought of obtaining a veritable catalog of current PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube games at prices as low as \$5 per game can do that to any red-blooded gamer, and this is doubly true to a starving student like myself.

But, curiously, there is honor among cheap asses. Rather than use their cheap ass information to encourage a feeding frenzy of clearance titles in stores nationwide, Cheap Ass Gamers frown on buying up obscene amounts of clearance games with the intent to resell - after all, their fellow Cheap Ass Gamers can't buy *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* for \$9 if an earlier Cheap Ass Gamer snapped up all the copies to sell on eBay for \$20 apiece. "Hoarding" is taking advantage of sales to turn a profit on eBay - or elsewhere. Unlike other "deal

sites," on CAG, hoarding is considered bad form," David IMs. "The CAGs view these sales as opportunities to purchase and play games that they wouldn't otherwise have had the opportunity to enjoy. They view games as more than just a commodity."

Instead, CAGs will take requests from other CAGs who, for whatever reason, can't make it to the sales, with the understanding that the recipient of the favor will return the favor at their next opportunity. Indeed, the Cheap Ass Gamer experience doesn't end at the checkout aisle. CAGs are encouraged to pick up multiple copies of popular titles for use as "trade fodder" - that is, games that aren't their personal domain, but can be traded to another CAG for a game that strikes their fancy, enabling CAGs who aren't catered to by their local stores to get in on the cheap ass gaming action.

But what happens when a trade goes afoul? CheapyD explains, "For the most part, it has been relatively smooth

sailing. The community has been very good about policing itself and it is not unusual to see the CAGs help each other out when things go wrong. Recently, someone got ripped off and a CAG who was local to the bad trader actually made a house call." I raise my eyebrows in surprise. He can't see that, of course, but I suppose my shock was apparent. "Nobody got their ass kicked or anything like that. I believe the bad trader's parents were informed of their child's wrongdoings."

Phew. Kicking someone's ass in the name of affordable, accessible gaming just doesn't sound right, somehow.

My chat with Mr. Abrams doesn't go much further from here. We talk a little bit about his noble efforts to get a CAG

contribution to Child's Play that eventually came in at over \$3,000; I can only imagine how hard it was to milk three grand out of a bunch of self-identified cheap asses. But in the end, it's not really just about saving money. "The focus will always be on the community - that's really the most important thing," David tells me, and somehow, even over the impersonal medium of instant messaging, I get the feeling that I should have known that the whole time.

Wow.

Appearances **really are** deceiving.

[COMMENTS](#)

Pat Miller has been doing this for way too long.

Kicking someone's ass in the name of affordable, accessible gaming just doesn't sound right.



TO BE THE HERO

by Spanner

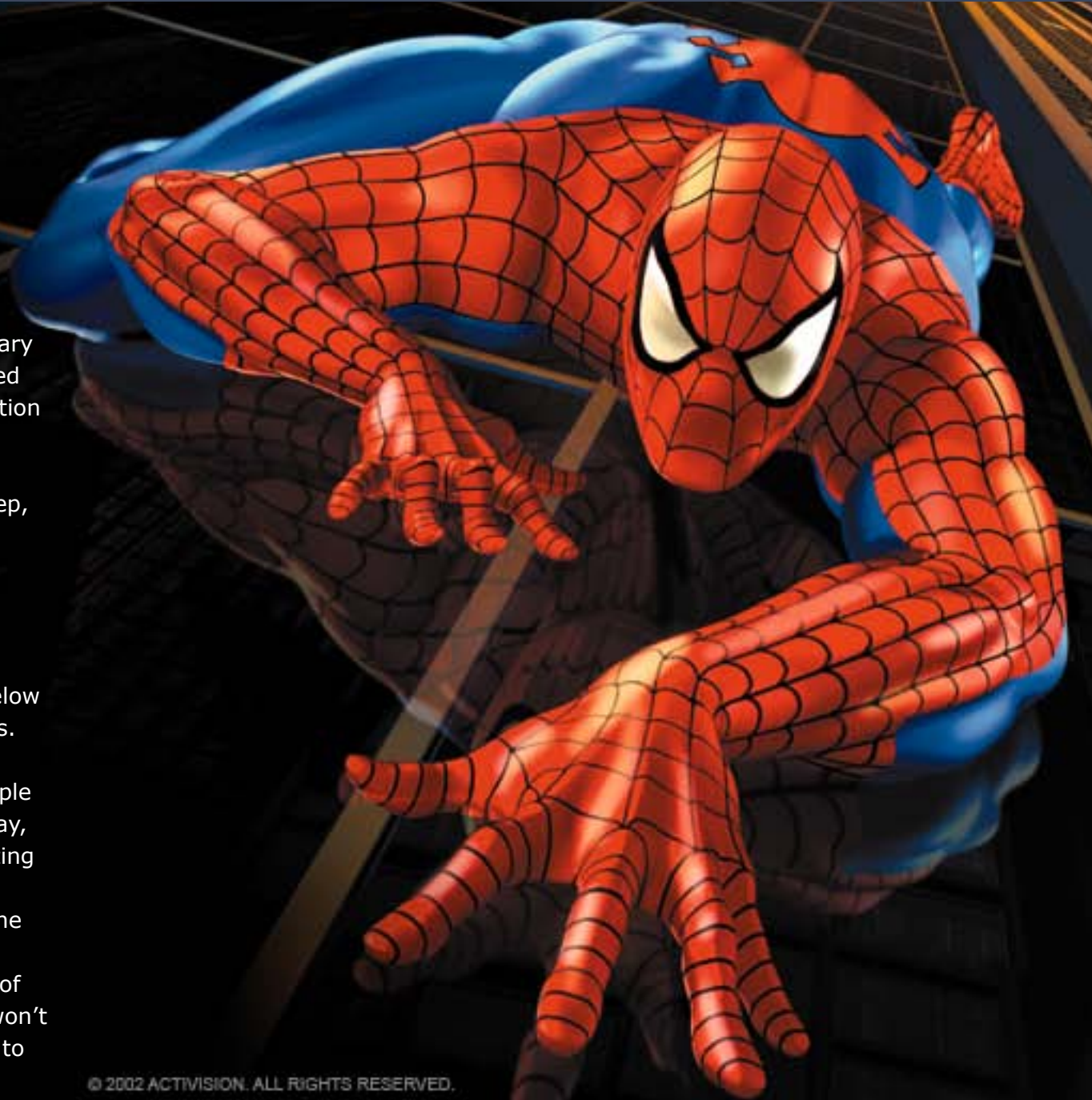
There is a picture of me in one of my mum's meticulously dated photo albums wearing a Spider-Man mask on December 25th, 1980, when I was a bright eyed cherub of five good years, full of excitement, wonder and dreams. Sort of.

Flicking through the next few pages of that same photo album, you would be forgiven for thinking they were also taken around that same Christmas, due to the regular recurrence of my alter ego, Spider-Span. In truth, however, these now mildly mortifying photos are months and years apart, and in fact, I type this article for you now with my head tilted back and sideways so I can see through the eyeholes of a child's mask. In short, Spider-Man rules!

Throughout my youth, across my teens and into an unripe manhood, I have

endeavored to read all the great literary classics of our age, and have benefited greatly through the intellectual evolution and philosophical understanding of humankind these works of erudite, cultural exploration have provided. Yep, *The Hulk*, *Batman*, *Ghost Rider*, *The Punisher*, *The Fantastic Four*, *Usagi Yojimbo*, *The Silver Surfer*, *Akira*, *Spider-Man* - I've read 'em all, and I continue to read them now, lest my knowledge of classic literature slip below the highest of academic requirements.

Creating a good super hero is no simple task. What is it that we want from, say, the Punisher? I've no problem admitting I find sex and violence to be highly entertaining, and what I want from the Punisher is an inch thick slice of the latter (though probably not so much of the former, if I'm being truthful). It won't do, however, for Stan "The Man" Lee to



simply bung a chrome-plated leviathan of a gun in Frank Castle's hand and have him wandering the streets murdering the criminal class in imaginative and gruesome ways; no, no. That wouldn't do at all.

Despite the fact this is essentially how the Punisher spends his violent and eccentric life, we have to believe that what he does, he does for the right reasons (at least, as far as he believes them to be). His appeal would be irretrievably diminished if Frank Castle

We must believe Frank is doing the unspeakable things he does because he is trying to help people.

simply wasted a bunch of wise guys, stopped off at SUBWAY for a chicken teriyaki on hearty Italian, went home to his suburban duplex and put his feet up to watch *Scrubs* before having an early night 'cause he's taking out the Vitelli gang tomorrow. Nor must he simply engage in nonstop onslaught where his every waking hour is filled with the mayhem and bloodshed that make him such an interesting fellow to read about.

Although it may not be close to the fore of our minds when journeying with the Punisher, it is our subconscious interest in the life and tribulations of his mortal alias, Frank Castle, as he tries (and fails) to reconcile his past by proactively saving other people from criminals akin to those who destroyed his world, that actually captures our imagination. We **must** believe Frank is doing the unspeakable things he does because he is trying to help people. All super heroes have this central driving force at their core, even if it isn't something we initially recognize as a major part of their appeal.

What is particularly enthralling about reading comic books is their abundance of character development. With a good

30 years of history for even a "young" super hero, comics easily lend themselves to that most important aspect for audience identification: depth of character. Although we may think we like *Lord of the Rings* because of the huge battle sequences, or Spider-Man because he can climb walls, none of that would make any difference to us if we weren't emotionally involved with Frodo or Peter Parker.

It's the colossal battles and wall crawling escapades that are the prime fodder in a videogame, however, so why do these conversions consistently fail to deliver? In principle, comic book super heroes, who have already had their own personal distinctiveness established by another medium are the ideal candidates for just this kind of application.

To be fair to the programmers, it's an immensely difficult task. They are effectively re-writing the character's history and present actions, while all the tools and devices used by other creative mediums are effectively removed from their arsenal. While a script writer (comic or movie) has complete control over the visual development of the character and their story, a programmer has to let the

player make those decisions for themselves. They must communicate a complete story and also the impact the story's **events** have on the life of an existing character, which is already replete with fanatic, detail-obsessed fans.

The movie and the comic can take us into the life of Peter Parker, Frank Castle or Norrin Radd, away from their costumes and powers, and bring the audience closer to them to feel their anguish and joys, fully appreciating them as rounded, believable people. Aside from the odd cut scene, however, a software developer would be committing commercial suicide by including a level in *Spider-Man* where we would play as Peter Parker battling his emotional turmoil over an inability to pay his rent:

"Use Parker's special ability to act all awkward and feeble in order to help Aunt May open a bank account and buy some new pants before the shops close! Get the free toaster from the belligerent bank clerk for an extra bonus!"

It might bring you closer to Peter's predicament during the movie, but in a videogame, it's just a waste of your

wireless controller's batteries. Neither do we want to sit and be inactively entertained by watching the characters' origins in extended FMV sequences, so a game's developer must tell us the story, teach us about the history of the character's world, make us empathize with our protagonist **and** provide an enjoyable playing experience from the second the start screen disappears. No small wonder it's rarely achieved.

In order to love our super heroes, in all their guises, we've already decided they must allow us to feel as though we're helping our fellow man or woman – that's right, I'm a genuine "nineties man" (despite the fact it's 2006) – by hurting other, less likeable fellow men or, indeed, women. Strap on a few super powers or special abilities to our deep, moral epitome of human excellence, and you've got yourself a workable character from which many a great story and game can be fashioned. There is a snag, of course: One character does not a story make.

Heroes need villains, villains need victims and victims need predicaments. All these components must be equally three dimensional in order for us to

Heroes need villains, villains need victims and victims need predicaments.

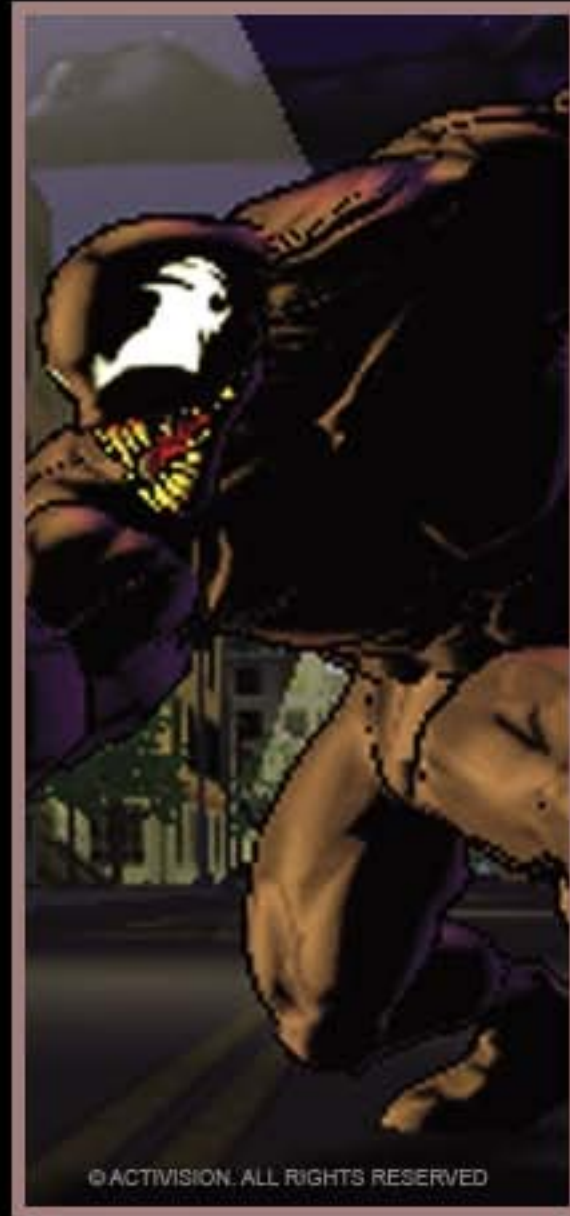
become fully immersed in the wants and needs of the main character. If Spidey simply took himself a safe distance from the Green Goblin's hand propelled pumpkin bombs and webbed him to the wall until the police sauntered by, we wouldn't perceive the Wall Crawler to have achieved anything of particular worth, and his status would be reduced to just "hero," having done nothing especially "super." And the Green Goblin would be neither threat nor sympathetic entity if he simply got bored of being a multi-millionaire and decided to go on a pointless, egomaniacal rampage. His history and the events that lead him to the desperate measures, which pushed him over the edge of humanity and into the realm of the desperate criminal, must be believable, and it is this aspect a wise game developer would use to make us empathize with the characters.



the Escapist

Since the programmer can only show us brief snippets of direct information regarding the objectives and circumstances of our involvement in the hero's life (assuming, that is, that they don't want to bore and irritate us), the most useful tool for drawing the player into the emotive back story is through the protagonist's conflicts. *Spider-Man 2* (the game of the movie of the comic) is an excellent example of how this is done, while the sequel (of sorts), *Ultimate Spider-Man*, fails for exactly the same reason.

In *Spider-Man 2*, the game begins by dropping Web Head onto the streets of New York directly under the control of the player. All about the map are members of the public shouting for help, crimes being readily perpetrated and somewhere, one of Spidey's many fantastical enemies is causing havoc and endangering the lives of the strangers our hero feels obliged to protect. So, what do you do? The Lizard is tearing up a lab on the other side of town, two gangs are brawling in the streets, a little girl has just lost her balloon and there's only one Spider-Man! You quickly come to realize the thorny choices a hero must react to at every instance; and when it



comes down to it, stopping the Lizard's rampage **must** take precedence over a balloonless child, regardless of how much it might pull at your heartstrings to hear her crying as you swing past.

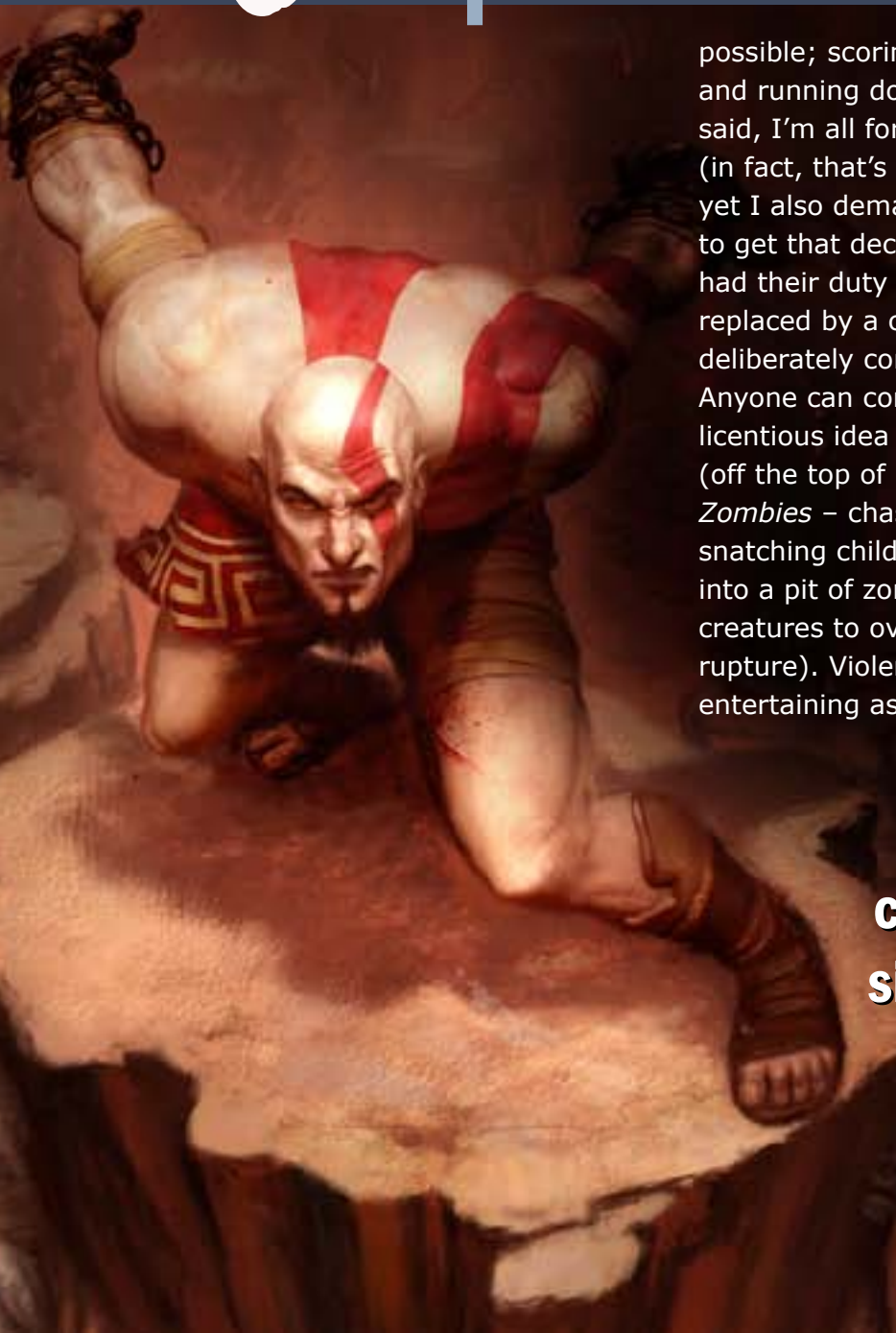
So, even though the game has told us nothing about the inner turmoil faced by an overworked super hero whose only want is to save people the tragedies **he** once suffered, you are forced to appreciate his overwhelming situation on a very personal level, by suffering the choices Spider-Man must make every minute he is wearing his mask. The depth of character and inherent humanity of the Wall Crawler is shown to us through the actions of his antagonists and the difficult decisions he must make for the greater good.

In *Ultimate Spider-Man*, however, the same developer fell into a trap in which many a comic and movie script writer has become ensnared as a result of to the audience's apparent approval of a particular antagonist: playing the part of the bad guy. In essence, I have no issue with this, although simply switching roles and attempting to score the same audience identification with an immoral criminal is inherently flawed. This is not

to say a **protagonist** can't have darker, less ethical sensibilities (we've already discussed the Punisher), but that central premise of wanting to help people **cannot** be at the core of Venom's or the Green Goblin's psyche, since their motivation - as counter-points to the hero - is about reckless personal gain without concern for others. You cannot engage with a character you subconsciously want to lose!

Venom is a terrific character - one of my all time favorites from the Marvel universe - and at first thought, it sounds like a great idea donning the symbiotic mantle of the anti-Spidey and wreaking up the city, but this also means retraining your emotions so you feel comfortable **defeating** Spider-Man; two story telling devices that are implicitly contrary and subsequently unable to coexist in the same story, leaving the player despondent and no longer caring about **either** character, and therefore, the game.

The gaming world has been in a vortex of controversy ever since the first *Grand Theft Auto* title was released, whereby the player's objectives were to act as depraved and low a character as



possible; scoring points for car jacking and running down pedestrians. As I've said, I'm all for violence and debauchery (in fact, that's what I call "Friday night"), yet I also demand that the games I play to get that decadent fix have not simply had their duty to engage the player replaced by a continuous string of deliberately contentious gratuitousness. Anyone can come up with a sick, licentious idea for a controversial activity (off the top of my head: *Hungry, Hungry Zombies* – chase around a playground snatching children and throwing them into a pit of zombies, causing the undead creatures to overfeed until their livers rupture). Violence alone is not as entertaining as it may first appear; it

Anyone can come up with a sick, licentious idea for a controversial activity...

must be backed up by the premise of acting for some munificent purpose.

A good counterpoint to *Grand Theft Auto* is *God of War*. Here, the protagonist is a genocidal warmonger who has sold his soul to the devil; a great start for anyone looking to spill some blood and guts. And they wouldn't be displeased, since this is the basic engine for the ensuing hack 'n' slash gameplay. Yet Kratos, despite his intrinsic similarity of action to the characters of *Grand Theft Auto*, has been given an emotional standpoint that allows the player to understand the choice and purpose of his primarily sadistic nature.

Assailing a passing civilian with a flamethrower in *GTA* seems unjustified and ultimately harms the longevity of the game, while Kratos pushing a caged innocent into a furnace in order to save Athens is a dramatic, poignant, yet comprehensible decision that helps the player come to terms with the gravity of being a hero, further enhancing their enjoyment.

It's all very well saying how monumentally stacked the odds are against the struggling videogame script

writer to create a believable, engaging cast while telling a story and providing an entertaining outlet, but the fact remains that ever since the first RPG was made, computer and videogames have been sorely lacking in well developed characters. In all other forms of modern media, audience identification is the single most important facet, be it a book, sitcom, comic, movie, play, radio drama or puppet show.

If the increasingly voracious videogame industry wants to draw people into the endless worlds that constitute even the most basic of modern games and accept the events that happen there, they will have to begin pouring the same effort into creating credible, sympathetic characters who their audience – since today's player is as much a viewer and a reader, as they are a gamer – can empathize with, and whose motives they can believe in; whether it's murdering the Gods, swinging through skyscrapers, pistol whipping drug addicts or rescuing kittens from trees. [COMMENTS](#)

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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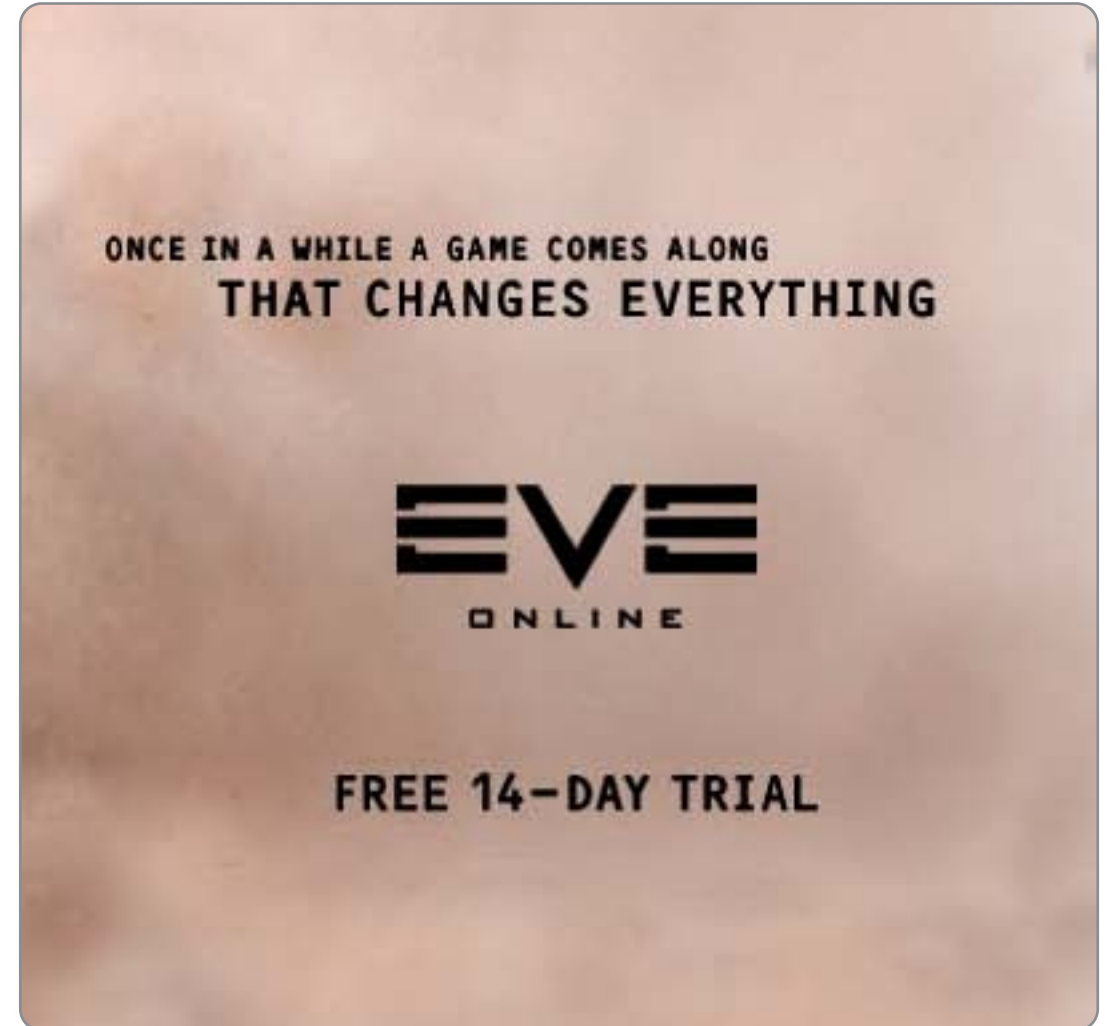
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One Night in ARATHI

by Mark Wallace

Cooperation comes in many different forms. In virtual worlds, it most often takes the shape of the five-man quest parties formed in *World of Warcraft*, the player clans that vie for control of powerful castles in *Lineage II* or the battle plans formed by trigger-happy soldiers in *World War II Online*. In general, players with common interests are happy to work together to accomplish a common goal. Sometimes, though, help can be found in places we least expect.

This story takes place in Azeroth, the fictional world of *World of Warcraft*. In the history of my virtual lives, it was a singular event. More importantly, it's the kind of occurrence that, when it happens, gives me faith that virtual worlds are more than just the Hobbesian environments they're often made out to be, places where our virtual lives are nasty, brutish and short, and the only way to get by is to look out for Number One.

My latest *World of Warcraft* character is a troll Rogue (thus a member of the Horde faction, rather than the Alliance)

who, at the time of the story, was looking forward to reaching level 30. I'll call him Arc. Arc hangs out on a player vs. player server, where Horde and Alliance members can attack each other freely. I'm not always on the winning end of these encounters, of course, but I like the wider range of interactions possible in a PvP environment. Even when I'm the victim, interesting things can come of it. I had no idea how interesting, though, until the other night.

I logged on around midnight, thinking I'd just whack a single shellsnapper turtle near the undead town of Tarren Mill, grab the final piece of turtle meat I needed to complete a cooking quest, ding 30 and just log off. But as soon as I materialized in town, I found myself chatting to a couple of undead players about seven levels below me, one of whom was having trouble finishing a Warlock quest. He needed to cross the dangerous Arathi Highlands, get to the Wetlands on the other side and kill a non-player character who had apparently managed to resist his best efforts so far. Could I escort him across the Highlands and help him kill the guy, he wanted to

the Escapist

know. Sure, I said. I've been helped with similar quests in the past, and it was only right, I thought, that I pass along the assistance. This was a perfect opportunity.

In fact, I have never before traveled from Tarren Mill to the Wetlands, so I had no idea what the road through Arathi might hold. The threatening creatures to either side of us, though, were right around my level, so it didn't seem like it would be such a bad trip. But that night, the road was clogged with Alliance players running to and fro on errands. Repeated gankage ensued, and not in our favor. Most embarrassing


was our deaths at the hands of a level 34 gnome Warlock, who wiped us out twice in a row.

I gave up after the second attack, crouching down amid some weeds and hoping he'd just go away. But the little bugger soon spotted me. Instead of zapping me with a fireball, though, he just circumnavigated my brambles, hopped up and down a couple of times, then "/waved" to me using *World of Warcraft's* system of emotes.


While it wasn't the first time I'd been waved to by an Alliance character, whenever it happens, the gesture is

significant. *WoW* characters can speak and understand only the languages of their factions. Alliance chat reaches Horde eyes as a jumble of seemingly random letters, and vice versa. The one mode of communication that both factions share is the emote system Blizzard has built into *World of Warcraft*.

By targeting a character like Kamber, the gnome Warlock, and typing "/wave" on the chat line, I can create an "emote" that appears as "Arc waves to Kamber" in the chat window of both factions. Similarly, I can "/cheer" someone, I can "/thank" them and I can even "/spit" on them, as well as a host of other actions.

A large crowd of knights in armor, some on horseback, in a medieval setting. The knights are wearing various types of armor, including plate and chainmail. Some are on horseback, while others are on foot. The scene is set in a dark, outdoor environment, possibly a battlefield or a large gathering. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows. The overall atmosphere is one of a significant event or battle.

I've been helped with similar quests in the past, and it was only right, I thought, that I pass along the assistance.



Within the context of the game's lore, Kamber was my sworn enemy. But what was going on at that moment was more than the game.

In this case, I just "/waved" back, but didn't move – until Kamber let loose his next emote, which resulted in, "Kamber motions Arc to follow him."

In fact, it took a couple of similar motions and a couple of "/nods" from Kamber before I was willing to move. Finally, though, I took a chance. Even if he leads us straight to his powerful buddies, I figured, we'll at least have moved a bit farther down the road.


We met up with the aspiring undead Warlock, DethKnight, and his young Sidekick, and a short "conversation" ensued as Kamber attempted to win the two lower-level players over to his plan. It went something like this:

Kamber motions DethKnight to follow him.
DethKnight laughs at Kamber.
Arc shrugs at Kamber.
Kamber nods.
DethKnight waves at Kamber.
Kamber questions Arc.
Arc shrugs at Kamber.
Sidekick pees on Kamber.
Kamber frowns at Sidekick.
Kamber motions Arc to follow him.
Arc nods at Kamber.

And then we were off. For the next 30 minutes, the four of us made our way through Arathi together, whacking the occasional raptor and generally hopping up and down along the road to the Wetlands. I couldn't resist /cheering for Kamber along the way, /saluting him and occasionally /bowing to him, despite the fact that his faction-mates around Tarren Mill repeatedly tried to kill my fellow Hordelings and me whenever they got the chance. Within the context of the game's lore, Kamber was my sworn enemy. But what was going on at that moment was more than the game, it was a few people deciding the game's fiction wasn't sufficient, and exploring a different way to work together in the world.

When we finally reached the Wetlands, Kamber spoke to an NPC, who turned out to be the same one we needed to kill for DethKnight's quest. When Kamber was done, we offed the poor guy – whereupon I felt it only polite to / apologize to Kamber.

Then, it was time for the duel. Kamber arranged it by first /pointing to his own shadowy Warlock's minion, then /



pointing to DethKnight's minion, then repeating the sequence two or three times. Finally, Deth got the point and the two spectral bodyguards went at it, Kamber's winning easily, of course, but that wasn't the point. The point was, we were looking for ways to interact, and that was an obvious one, something that happens all the time within factions, but not so often between the two rival bands. When it was all over, we did a little /dance and sent Kamber on his way with a /bye, a /thank and another /bow.

On my solo run back to Tarren Mill, I pondered what had just happened. Here was a guy who, according to the game, should have been mercilessly roasting us to a crisp. And yet, he had stopped to offer his assistance and managed to provide us with an escort through dangerous territory. *World of Warcraft* does everything it can to keep players from one faction from helping those of the other. You're rewarded with Honor points for killing your enemies, and despite a long-promised Dishonor system to help prevent rampant slaughter, Blizzard has yet to deliver anything in that department. The artificial language barrier makes it difficult to even plead for mercy,

except, perhaps, through emotes. In the end, it's easier to just kill.

And yet, that night in the Arathi Highlands we managed to overcome all those obstacles and form a little band of adventurers that knew no factional prejudices, able to overcome a language barrier and set aside what we'd been taught about each other, and find a way of overcoming a game mechanic that was meant to keep us apart. In order to find a way to work together, we had to make the game more than just the sum of its parts.

Player vs. player? For us, that night, the phrase had no meaning. Better yet, it had its meaning turned upside down. I know we're not the first or only players to have engaged in this kind of emergent gameplay, but it's rare enough to be of note. Help can come from the most unexpected place. Kamber, I /salute you once again. [COMMENTS](#)

*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.*



Player vs. player?
For us, that night, the phrase had no meaning.

SICK OF HEALING

by John Walker

I'm not going to play a healer again.

We, as a people, sue hospitals. The degree of stupidity necessary for such an action should be impossible to grasp, so mind-destroyingly moronic we begin whirring, buzzing and emitting smoke from our circuits. Instead, we're used to it, even resigned to it. It is in our international character. Ask anyone who's ever played a healer in an MMOG.

My mistake was made entering Paragon City. This was a city of heroes – a place where **everyone** was a champion. I wanted to be a hero to those heroes. The decision to play nurse was an altruistic one. I could have chosen a healing power that helped just me, gave me that extra edge in the battle. But, instead, I bestowed my purple avatar, the elegant Nitefall, with an ability to drain energy from her enemies and transfer it into those around her.

On my own, this was a boon to my experience. Super-jumping my way through the boroughs, I might spot a low level player struggling against a crowd of vicious bad guys. Never fear, stranger! I'd land nearby, fire off the heal and then leap away before they could know what happened. Heroic. But, see, here's the thing with this particular power: It was never very reliable. There was a risk. A number of factors could cause things to go wrong: The enemy I'm sapping might die before the process was complete; I might take damage, thus interrupting the action; or the person I'm healing might move too far away to be in my area of effect (AoE). Of course, should I just generously be drive-by-healing, such a failure would go unknown. Put me in the middle of a pack of feisty fighters, and it's a quite different matter.

the Escapist

Nitefall was never offered as a group's healer. Warnings were always given – don't trust my heal, don't rely on it. Disclaimers shouted at the wind. Irrelevant. If you can heal, you should damn well heal, apparently, and any failure to do so was a disgusting slight against all involved. Nevermind they might have slain the very enemy that was due to save their life. Nevermind they may have flown too high for your AoE to reach. Nevermind you were being barraged by an electric bombardment of mystical lightning, peppered by chains of bullets, thrown through the air by the force of a dozen grenades... You. Failed. To. Heal.

Condemnation.

A doctor trains for at least seven years, barely making minimum wage throughout, and saves hundreds and hundreds of lives. No one notices. This is the bare minimum, the very least expected of him. We order a pizza, we expect a pizza to be delivered – no pizza results in angry phone calls and demands of free foodstuffs. Fair enough. We go to the hospital, we expect to get healed – here in the U.K., no healing results in angry phone calls and demands

of massive amounts of free compensation. Compensation paid for by our own taxes. Our own money. We've gone mad.

When you're the healer of the pack, every death of every companion is now your fault. In *City of Heroes*, death results in XP debt – a hefty cost. When the blame for the demise is inevitably laid at your feet, such a cost results in impotent resentment. It cannot be made up by another, XP cannot be transferred from the failing doctor to the dead-and-resurrected patient. So, instead, hostility is the out-of-court settlement. **We've gone mad.**

The healer, the generous, caring individual who set out to try to help others, is hated. Cursed. Failure is now supposed, expected, and when it occurs, you have demonstrable proof such an attitude was perfectly reasonable. Nevermind the 37 times you healed them before they ran too far away, nevermind the innumerable top-offs you gave their health bar before it reached even halfway empty. They go unnoticed, unrecognized, forgotten, buried beneath the transferred anger of another debt-developing fatality.



Hostility is the out-of-court settlement.
We've gone mad.

It's OK to die in a game. Really.

I don't need that. I don't need the weight of a responsibility I never offered or earned. I'm there to have fun! It stings that my charitable decision to take on such a beneficial power should result in such an intimidating experience. As yet, we are unable to sue each other within an MMOG – I doubt it can be far off. In the meantime, bitterness and public mockery are the payback.

I'm not going to play a healer again. Next time, I shall select a heal that boosts **my** chances. Let the others be damned, look after their own damn selves. There's no reason for me to put up with the suffering. No cozy super-consultant job awaits me, making this abuse worthwhile. It's every superhero for himself! And many shall die as a result of this.

It's too late for me. But it's not too late for future generations, our MMOG children. And people, I appeal to you, for the sake of the children, it's time to treat our healers with respect. People sue hospitals out of fear. Fear of their mortality. The failed procedure, the

botched operation, the unsuccessful treatment – all reminders of the fragility of our lives, and how desperately we do not wish to lose them. MMOGs are not life.

It's OK to die in a game. Really. And sure, it's annoying, and certainly, it comes with an imaginary cost. But the person healing, the person who failed to rescue you for whatever reason, is actually a person. You didn't die, but they **did** get insulted. You suffered no real harm, but they **did** feel the barbs of your words. You're wounding these people. Mentally destroying them. And you need them. So here's the plan: The next time you **are** successfully healed, and each and every time, you thank that person. You tell them you value their healing touch. And sure, get cross, tell them you're annoyed – that one moan, that small whinge, will be lost amid a sea of gratitude and praise in their gaming life. [COMMENTS](#)

John Walker is a rogue journalist, a rambling man, roaming from magazine to website, writing about videogames before anyone can stop him.

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 was your most philanthropic gaming act?”

Shannon Drake,
“Child’s Play: The Tai Chi Approach”

I paused to /laugh before finishing off this night elf Rogue, giving him a split second to wobble around on his feet before I plunged my dagger into his black heart.

Spanner,
“To Be the Hero”

I was playing a young lad at *Mortal Kombat* once. It was the last of his money and he really wanted to win just one match. I felt sorry for him, so I just beat him normally instead of ripping out his spine. I felt pretty good about that.

Pat Miller,
“Comrades in Cheap”

I intentionally lost a game of *Capcom vs. SNK 2* at Sunnyvale Golfland to a kid who looked like he was about five feet even in middle school at the latest. I say “intentionally,” though as it turned out, he didn’t need my help; apparently, he was a regular there, and had picked up a thing or two.

John Walker,
“Sick of Healing”

This Christmas I gave up my free pet Murloc so that a friend could send it to a *Warcraft* buddy as a present. It doesn’t sound like much, but when your best available pet is an orange tabby cat, it’s a hefty sacrifice.

Shawn Williams,
“Ask Not What Your Game Can Do For You ...”

If I could ever amount to anything in a single game, I swear I’d be generous. I’m on the very bottom of the food chain, and it’s hard to be generous with people constantly stabbing you in the face. I could try not screaming so loudly as they butcher me?

Mark Wallace,
“One Night in Arathi”

At the Second Life Herald, where I’m Editorial Director, we covered a cancer fundraiser that was held inside the virtual world. I like to think we helped raise the event’s profile and contributed to the fact that it raised something like \$5,000 for the American Cancer Society.

Joe Blancato,
“Contributing Editor”

Back before I was a total bastard, I was a volunteer Counselor in *Ultima Online*. I spent a lot of hours helping newbies with silly questions and diffusing a lot of flak from GMs. Either that, or the time I scammed this one guy and **didn’t** make fun of his mom.

JR Sutich,
“Contributing Editor”

I looted over 70 Holocrons in *SWG* and gave away all but 4 of them, weeks before the Christmas 2003 patch that gave them to everyone. At the time, they were selling for 30-50 millions credits on my server. Looking back, it was a stupid move. I could have unlocked my Jedi faster if I hadn’t wasted all that time being nice.

Julianne Greer,
“Executive Editor”

Well, I usually play single-player games, and when I’ve played multi-player, I’ve been pretty low on the totem pole. So, I haven’t really had much opportunity to be very charitable. I’ve done the fly-by heal in games, that’s about it.

