

the *Escapist*

Casual Friday

Making the Sacrifice

Striding the Wasteland

MEET THE TEAM!

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As anyone who has worked in, knows someone who has worked in or really has any vague notion of the media industry can tell you, advertising is key to the bottom line. That monthly/yearly subscription you pay? It about covers the production cost, whether it's the printing and shipping for a print magazine or the bandwidth and upkeep for an online publication. Ads pay for the rest – writers, editors, artists, equipment, office space and so on.

So, for a company to turn down ad dollars, either they have plenty of money, other advertisers in the wings or there's a really good reason. *PCGamer* has recently come upon a really good reason. They have recently made the announcement they will no longer take ads, and so money, from gold farmers.

It is a tough thing, turning down tens of thousands of dollars, **per month** (trust me, I **know**). That is several people's salary. That's updated software. That's a comfortable cushion for the slow months after the holidays, but before E3.

But, at some point, it has to be done. At some point, we need to take a look at what advertisers are doing and saying in our magazines. Yes, it has to be done for legal reasons; pointing to their \$7.2 million lighter wallet, *The Sporting News* can tell you that. But perhaps more important, we, as media gateways, have a responsibility to our audience.

This responsibility has led us, at *The Escapist*, to our advertising philosophy. The relevant bit here is that we have never accepted ads or money from gold farmers. In the nearly two years I have been around Themis Group, our parent company, we have never accepted ads from gold farmers on any of our properties. We've rooted out any gold farmer we find in our Google AdSense – almost 200 of them, to date. And over the years, we have turned down, quite literally, hundreds of thousands of dollars, money that was sometimes needed, because of ethics.

So, to *PCGamer*, and any others recently joining the fray: Welcome. It feels pretty good, doesn't it?

Cheers,



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor: First of all, thank you for doing everything you have done with *The Escapist*. It's wonderful and refreshing to have a serious, insightful look at the games industry and gamer culture.

This week's issue, "For Great Justice!" contained an article, "Child's Play: The Tai Chi Approach," that had a timely and personal connection for me. Just a week or so before this issue came out I started a personal project with the intention of doing my part to support Child's Play. Since I programmed small games for fun, and I knew several friends and acquaintances who did the same at my

high school, I decided to attempt to open a site offering these games as donation-ware, with all donations forwarded (no administration fees, of course) to Child's Play. The site, to be named TJGames.org (TJ being shorthand for Thomas Jefferson High School), is currently under construction, but I've been amazed already at how willing my fellow gamers are to contribute work to the site. Already several have agreed to contribute games, and the graphics for the site and the site itself are being developed free of charge by students who have much greater expertise in these areas than I.

The end result may not be all that much compared to more professional small games, but we aspire to create some genuinely fun products. Hopefully, this will be enough to raise awareness for Child's Play and perhaps to send some money their way.

-**Teddy McNeill**

P.S. The target date for the opening of TJGames.org is early March.

the Escapist

To the Editor: I've seen many a website and I must say that your website design is far and away the best I've ever seen. Have you won any awards or something? If I was a huge company and had a sweet award, I'd give it to you. It's so simple and clean and makes so much sense. wft I wish every site looked like yours.

Your new subscriber,
-Jesse

To the Editor: In "The Buzz is Gone" you mention that Noctis takes place in the Milky Way; it actually takes place in an entirely different procedurally-generated galaxy.

-Brandon

From The Lounge: [Re: "Comrades in Cheap" by Pat Miller] Thanks for the great article. It's by far the best written item on CAG in existence.

Keep up the good work!
-CheapyD

From The Lounge: [Re: "Child's Play: The Tai Chi Approach" by Shannon Drake] I am glad to see this getting some more press. When they started the

charity a few years ago I was like "Wow that is pretty cool, hope it goes well." Once the totals were tallied, I literally sat in awe staring at the pictures for several minutes.

"We" the gamers did this?

Then the next year, there were some Amazon issues but still it grew exponentially.

The part that really blew me away was the dinner/auction, the game companies really turned out and supported the entire thing. Once again I was in awe.

Penny Arcade (Gabe and Tycho) have proven not only to be funny on a Demi-God level, they are actually human, and honestly care about the well being of the world in general.

I hope to make it a family tradition with my daughters, (Toddler and Newborn at the moment) "Shopping for Child's Play gifts" will hopefully mean Christmas is coming to them as they get older.

Oh, and might I add, this overall issue of *The Escapist* contains some of the best articles I have read in it, since the article about *Second Life*.

-Cinomed



Late 1980s and BEYOND!

by John Szczepaniak



Some of the world's commentators say videogames are either incapable of having meaning, or are only now reaching that stage. Lev Grossman said it in Time magazine, film critic Roger Ebert chimed in and even Steven Spielberg joked about when someone confesses "they cried at level 17." Critics say many things, but specifically that games cannot yet match film and books. No disrespect to the above gentlemen, or anyone agreeing with them, but I am determined to show games have been tackling old ideas and complex issues **for at least** 15 years now. They are as worthy as any other medium, and do have meaning.

Looking back over the decades, it's easy to read into things that aren't there, or wrongly re-interpret certain elements to prove a point. For the record, I have never once thought *Pac-Man* was a metaphor for drug taking or consumerism. You have to look at the motives of the visionaries creating games, finding those who intentionally set out to make statements through their work.

In Japan narratives dealing with fundamental ideas started to arrive in 1985, with early RPGs like *Dragon Quest* and many detective adventure titles. Seen as pioneering, they're fondly remembered as being full of charm. People who were fully-fledged writers before turning their hand to games mainly wrote them, after all.

Things progressed before culminating with *Mother* in 1989, previously covered in *The Escapist*. Having struggled through painfully archaic design mechanics until the end, which sees you peacefully ending your grandmother's existence and being stranded in the desert, you are left with an empty feeling and many deep questions. While the methods of conveying events weren't as elegant as in the sequel, there was genuine literary weight to the game.

Other RPGs have also given players the difficult task of killing someone close. The original monochrome *Seiken Densetsu*, released in 1991, only allowed further progression if you fulfilled a female friend's request. She begs for death, and this self-sacrifice results in her brother's salvation, which continues the story. It didn't have the flamboyant splendour of next-gen hardware, but neither did it shy away from such a subject.

In 1992, a title featuring congressman Masuzoe Youichi was released. It was an adventure game, classed as an "intra-office politics simulation." It subtly tackled the realities of office life, difficult bosses, and using sycophancy to succeed. Ironically, while American political figures fear games and demand bans, Japan accepts games, regarding them as something to be utilized.

One of the landmark titles in the early 1990s was the Western Sega CD port of Hideo Kojima's phenomenal *Snatcher* (originally a 1988 NEC PC title). The game was uncompromisingly hard-boiled

and visceral, smothered in an excellent science-fiction storyline. It featured an amnesiac, recently estranged from his equally ailed wife, as he investigates an otherworldly threat and tries to piece his life back together. Borrowing from films like *Blade Runner* and *Body Snatchers*, it also had underlying themes of social paranoia and McCarthyism (there are **many** cold war references), and ultimately makes you question human nature. But it was still a game! Weaved within this finely crafted storyline were perfectly integrated puzzles and tense shooting scenes where a lightgun could be used. No separate element felt arbitrarily attached. Kojima has done much for videogames over the years, debating aspects of humanity with them, and yet only became recognized after creating *Metal Gear Solid*, in 1998.

Which brings me to my final (and personal favorite) example: *Toys For Bob's Star Control 2*, initially released in 1992 and influenced by *Starflight*. The game itself was utterly compelling throughout, comprising arcade-style action, exploration, strategy and

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diplomacy, while the scripting was second to none. Don't be fooled by the fantastical setting - the story maturely dealt with wide ranging issues, from genocide to religious extremism, and still remained terrifying, touching and damn funny in places.

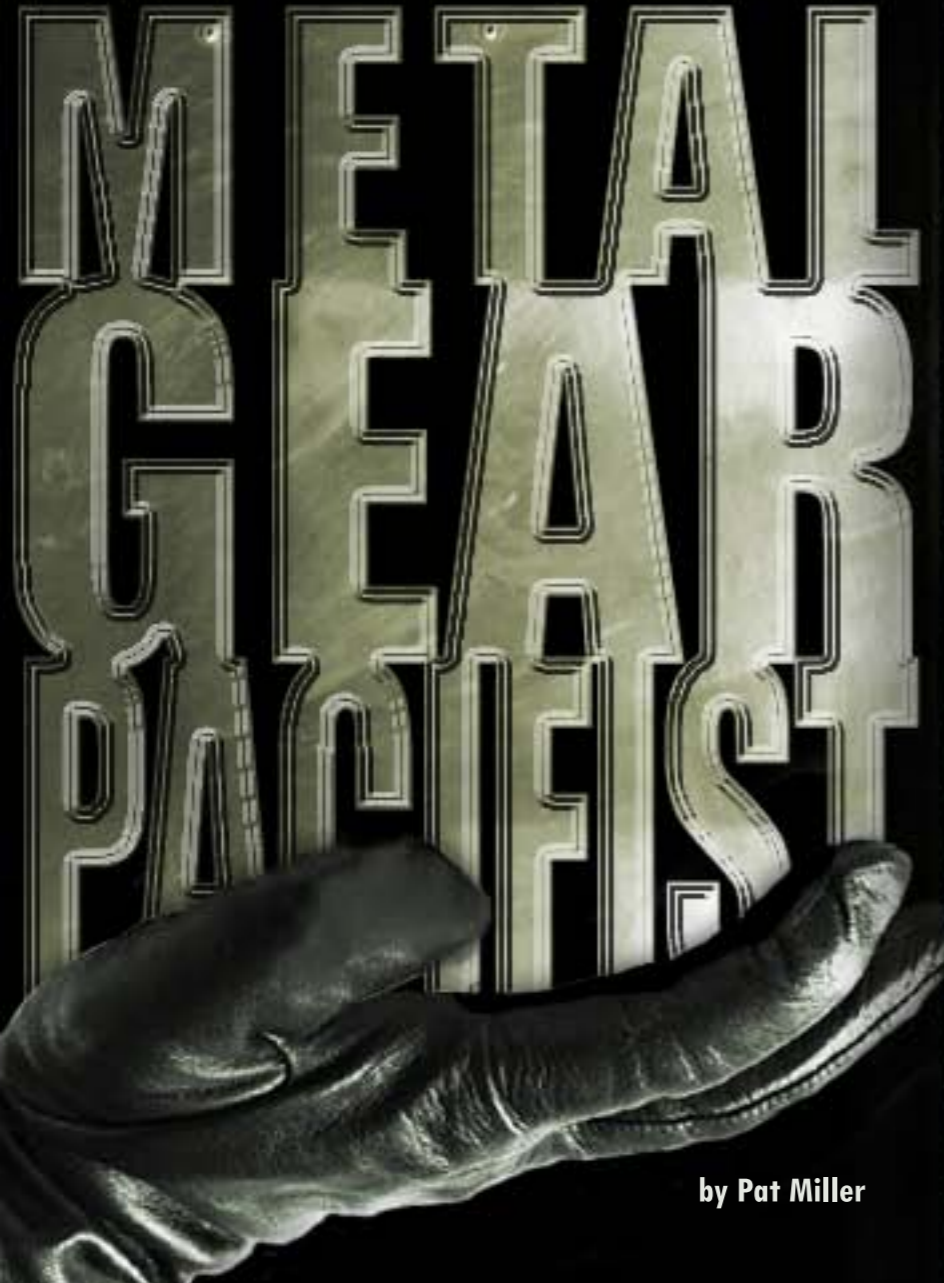
The always jovial head of TFB, Paul Reiche III, kindly took time out from his Christmas holidays to talk. "We intended for the alien races to exemplify human personal and cultural foibles in a focused and exaggerated manner," humbly understating that he did what we think all good science fiction should do. He also revealed a human side to the ominous Ur-Quan: "My own take on [them] came from my relationships with people who had experienced significant childhood abuse and how those traumas produced distinctly odd behaviors in adults. [Their] doctrines were the overtly crazy but internally reasonable responses to their treatment by the Dynarri, and the pain they had to endure to win their freedom from slavery." Further running themes

examined cultural intolerances (racial, religious, gay etc.), as seen in the Androsynth's oppression by "normal" humans. Thankfully, the burden of proof lies with the game, now freely available.

Videogames don't need cell processors, billions of polygons or realism to be immersive, profound and capable of dealing with complex issues. Equally as important, they don't need to lose their sense of play or interactivity to have rich and worthy narratives dealing with the above. Great game designers have always found ways to perfectly marry the two. While this young medium has been trying to elevate itself for well over a decade, the publishers and mainstream masses are only now waking up to the possibilities.

[COMMENTS](#)

John Szczepaniak is a South African freelance videogame writer with a preference for retro games. He is also a staff member on the Retro Survival project, which contains articles on retro gaming and is well worth investigating.



by Pat Miller

We gamers love **choice**.

Presumably, that's a large part of the reason we play games. We love to **choose**, whether it means going for the rocket launcher over the rail gun, picking Storm instead of Sentinel or playing through *Civilization II* as a ruthless emperor instead of a republic's president. We love our games because they reflect **us** and all the decisions we make, even if that means getting fragged, having to put up another quarter or getting erased from history by the barbarians at the gates.

This is why I'm continually baffled by the gaming industry. We like our gameplay **open-ended**, our endings **multiple** and our cameras **free-rotating**, but we rarely see a game evoke the same kind of primal calls of conscience we see in, say, a movie. Watching Luke Skywalker decide between good and evil in the original *Star Wars* trilogy was a wholly gut-wrenching, existential experience. Watching me decide whether I want to be good or evil in *Jedi Knight II* means watching me figure out if I want the Force Heal power more than the Force Choke. Even the gaming industry's

darling *Grand Theft Auto* series, for all its widely acclaimed in-game options, has precious little **meaningful choice**. Steal cars to make money to buy bigger guns - whatever. Stealing cars to make money to set up youth community centers for low-income neighborhoods - now, **that's** an interesting moral conundrum I haven't seen in any games yet. And to be honest, seeing the same crap make it onto EBGames' shelves month in and month out really gets a gamer down.

So, perhaps you can understand why I was so surprised to find, during my first play through of *Metal Gear Solid* a year ago, some game designers really do understand the tools of their craft well enough to convey a truly **meaningful choice**. While *MGS'* iconic stealth gameplay has been imitated far and wide, from *Splinter Cell* to *Syphon Filter*, the skill and intention Hideo Kojima lends to the *Metal Gear Solid* series haven't. Kojima uses the unique choice-driven attributes of the videogame medium to get across a simple moral - **do not kill** - in a way that hits much deeper than any book or movie.

the Escapist


<SPOILER ALERT: These games are pretty cool. You might want to consider playing them for yourself before reading on. I'm going to try and be gentle about spoilers, but not too gentle.>

The original *Metal Gear Solid* is commonly remembered for its TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION; that is, its emphasis on sneaking around and being stealthy instead of mowing down anything and everything between you and the goal. When we play this game several years later, amid the countless stealth-based games composing the genre *MGS* spawned, the TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION feels stilted and somewhat contrived. Controlling Solid Snake with the degree of precision that any gamer born on first-person shooters is accustomed to is virtually impossible, and the combat itself is a downright nuisance, since the lack of any first-person aiming system makes it difficult for Snake to aim at anyone not caught in the camera's immediate view.

A few nights ago, I was tasked with finding a mine detector before taking on a very large tank. This wasn't too bad,

thankfully, as I had already played the game before and knew where it was. But it still took me a good 15 minutes to do, and the first 10 or so were spent trying clumsily to sneak up on and whack the guards between Snake and the mine detector. I tried silenced pistols, automatic rifles, grenades of all shapes and sizes, even hand-to-hand combat - none of them could get me to the mine detector and back satisfactorily unscathed. After dying repeatedly ("Snake? Snake? SNAAAAAKE!" ad nauseum) I tried it without attacking anybody, and got it on my first try. Hmm.

It's not perfect, to be sure. To credit Konami with intentionally making combat obnoxiously clumsy is a stretch, and the entire scenario above could have transpired simply because I am amazingly bad at playing *MGS*. But it's not hard to see this was what Kojima was trying to get across. Snake's own role as the reluctant hero, elaborated in Codec conversations and storyline moments, very clearly illustrates his distaste for unnecessary killing, and Liquid Snake even goes so far as to accuse Snake of enjoying gunning down



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For the first time, the player was capable of getting through the game without killing a single person.

enemy soldiers, just to get a rise out of him. Kojima intentionally uses **everything** in *MGS* - from the memory card to the back of the CD case to the Dual Shock controller - with the intent of telling his story, so it would be uncharacteristically inconsistent of him to not keep that in mind while designing the gameplay itself. But *MGS* is still too crude to articulate any of this very well; to a certain extent, it feels like the player has no **real choice** quite yet.

So, from here, we proceed to *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*, a game which managed to piss off all the newly created *Metal Gear Solid* fans by giving them a whiny *bishounen* punk kid instead of the beloved Solid Snake, and telling a story that is half spy-thriller and half love story **at the same time**. Perhaps the greatest improvement *MGS2* had over *MGS* was a combat system that didn't suck; thanks to additions like a first-person combat view and localized damage, killing was easier than ever. However, we also had a new weapon at our disposal, namely, a tranquilizer gun that works on everyone, including bosses, meaning,

for the first time, the player was capable of getting through the game without killing a single person. Unlike *MGS*, attaining the highest end-game ranking ("Big Boss") **required** the player kill absolutely nothing throughout the entire game.

But if *MGS* gave us too strong an incentive to avoid killing, *MGS2* ditched the incentive altogether. Sure, hardcore *Metal Gear Solid* fans will most likely rise to the occasion, but the average Joe or Jane is probably not going to even bother playing through the game a second time, and will have had little to no idea they were ever supposed to avoid killing people. Where *MGS* may have been too heavy-handed, *MGS2* wasn't nearly heavy-handed enough. The same **do not kill** theme was in there, but it was buried underneath a plot full of weird. It didn't do what *MGS* did **right** - that is, tie the theme directly to the game. Instead, the incentives to avoid killing were virtually irrelevant, if you don't care about rating or collecting all the dog tags.

Last comes *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*. Unlike the first two, the game's

balance and pacing was heavily inspired by action movies, and as such, it was perfectly reasonable to play through like Rambo. The rewards for using non-lethal means increased, though; in addition to requiring zero kills for a Big Boss rating, each of *MGS3*'s bosses only dropped their trademark camouflage items when you knocked them out. Perhaps one of the most significant moments of the game, however, pitted you in a boss fight against a long-deceased psychic named The Sorrow, who had the supernatural ability to communicate with the dead. This haunting "fight" took place in a ghostly jungle river similar to one the player had traversed earlier, except this time Snake was forced to wade upstream, dodging bullets and encountering the ghosts of every single life he took, ranging from jungle animals he killed and ate to gruesome shadows of enemy soldiers who recount exactly how the grisly deed was done. And, despite his extensive arsenal and elaborate hand-to-hand combat training, Snake couldn't fight back - all he could do is

continue upstream and do his best to dodge the ghosts of his past. This was no minor segment, either; should the player be fairly indiscriminate in his killing, it could take upwards of 20 minutes to complete.

The moral, here, was unmistakable, of course. Rather, it's the way Kojima went about conveying it that was so interesting. Instead of using the story and dialogue sequences to communicate to the player, *MGS3* managed to use the elements of player choice to set the medium of a videogame apart from, say, books and movies. In a sense, Kojima gave you a portion of the game entirely, and somewhat perversely, player-created - that is, a product of nothing more than the player's earlier choices - and derived a meaningful message from it. He completely surrendered his game to the whims of the player's choice (which stands as artistic anathema to people like Roger Ebert), and in doing so, he got across exactly the message he wanted. Indeed, it is the player's personal involvement in the game - and thus

killing dozens of virtual human beings - that makes this scene so compelling. Books and movies, as passive media, relate a message to the reader by presenting a story where the reader sees the consequences of the protagonist's decisions and interprets from there. Videogames, as *MGS3* would have us understand, can be aimed directly at **the player**.

It is the regrettable truth that as popular as the *Metal Gear Solid* franchise is, it's never popular for any of these reasons. If *MGS* is the original TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION game and *MGS2* is the one with the annoying protagonist, *MGS3* will be forever remembered as the one that is half James Bond, half John Rambo. But underneath that action-movie exterior lies a brilliant sense of game design that does, ironically, what so many games fail to do adequately: tell a story **only** a videogame can tell. [COMMENTS](#)

Pat Miller has been doing this for way too long.

Kojima gave you a portion of the game entirely, and somewhat perversely, player-created.

an exit

by Patrick Dugan

I am constantly choking on the raw physicality of everyone around me, and all I want is a bit of freedom. Only when we play is our time together heaven, but otherwise I'm in agreement with a dead French guy named Jean-Paul Sartre – hell is other people.

Sartre, like a whole bunch of other alienated folks throughout the ages, decided to express his angst in literary form, particularly in a play called *No Exit*, from which the above phrase is taken. The play features three individuals: a heterosexual man, a heterosexual woman and a lesbian. It sets them in a well-decorated room they're told is their eternal resting place. A single door admits them entry and presumably escape, yet each time they attempt to leave, they're held back by social compunction. Efforts to be silent and not interact with each other eventually fail, and every time a pleasurable relationship begins to form between two parties, the third's influence disrupts the harmony.

No matter one's own take on existentialist philosophy, it's easy to concede the sentiment of Sartre's play is a fairly sophisticated one, and capturing such a sentiment in the interactive medium would be quite a feat. In July 2005, Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern accomplished that very feat, with an interactive drama called *Façade*.

There are exceptions to every rule, and a definite exception to "hell is other people" was Phrontisterion 2005. I watched, along with a gaggle of other hopeful innovators, as the finished build of *Façade* was played, for the first time, on Chris Crawford's kitchen table. I remember the candor of the voice actors, the significance of their motions – much weightier than any FPS stroll – and the careful typing of Laura Mixon, a Storytron storybuilder, as she engaged these virtual constructs with fresh eyes and nimble fingers. I asked Michael if a player could cajole the drama's main characters, the married Trip and Grace, into a threesome; he said you could try.

Like *No Exit*, *Façade* is a one act dramatic discourse, involving three actors in a room accessible by a single portal – the catch is, the audience **is** one of those three actors. The player interacts with dramatic elements to determine the outcome of the story, aptly coined “interactive drama.” Entering text on an open parser, the user’s expressive input is interpreted by the governing drama management AI’s shallow language processing. These interpretations boil down to combinations of verb primitives, “discourse acts,” which determine the resolution of a beat and the next successive beat, or major dramatic chunk, of which there are 27 total. Roughly 16 of these beats add up to a single play through, which can end in one of four ways – each of which involves someone making an exit.


Most game designers would balk at the term “interactive drama,” off handedly dismissing the possibility of virtual characters and social gameplay as being contrary to the nature of computers. They’d say games are supposed to be about physical conflict, measured in hit

points and skinned with blank facial textures. Some give the idea a queer look of revulsion, fearing interactive drama will subvert the industry’s traditional ludic values or even make games “homosexual”. These fears are justified: Interactive drama is going to change everything; the ludic will be subverted.

Maybe people suffer because of each other; maybe we’re so defined by our interactions with society and technology, suffering is inherent and pervasive to being human. Maybe every honest coder and graphic designer who woke up on their office floor this morning did so because it’s just the way things are. When you’ve been idling (or working) in hell for long enough, it can certainly seem like there’s no other way. The game industry has locked itself in a room, splitting cups of ramen for what seems like an eternity of crunch time agony. The door is unlocked, but we stay in because of fear, held back by the call of the collective, suspended in a grim consensus.



Façade has shown us the door, all we have to do is walk through it.



And why not? It's a comfortable room, after all. We've got our plush couch, our new NVIDIA powered graphics card, our tidy assumptions about lineated goal-orientation, spatial level design, an uncross-able gulf between game and story which nevertheless keeps sending memetic hurricanes our way. The truth is, play is older than both games and stories, and despite its parsing fuzziness, end-game agency constraints and a rather contrived narrative set-up of a bickering couple with irreconcilable differences, *Façade* has a very real joy of play, fleshed out in free social expression. *Façade*'s social dilemma has an exit, an exit found through play.

Unlike Sartre's deterministic expository text, Mateas and Stern have shown us, hard coded in algorithmic form, there is hope, provided we're inventive enough to mediate our differences. Likewise, there is hope for the game industry; *Façade* has shown us the door, all we have to do is walk through it.

If you take my words seriously, running to that door with dewy optimism, there is a chance you may find it locked by

some technical glitch. The way out of the ludic box might not come intuitively, and the hard problems of interactive drama may seem ill addressed by the above text. I humbly offer the blueprint for the key.

The theory of game design is heavily limited, as seen in practice. This is largely because any "theory of game design" has until recently been confined to fuzzy definitions inside the intuitive drives of individual developers. Many unnecessary assumptions are embedded in the minds of practicing designers. We've assumed games are games and that's all there is to it, players equate challenge with an interesting experience, and there is no market for titles without concrete objectives. In contrast to "ludic" is another Latin term, *paidia*, standing at the other end of the spectrum. What we commonly described as games is ludic play, structured by rules and inherently goal-oriented. *Paidic* play is unstructured and opened ended, it is the primal learning activity that predates games and culture. *The Sims*, a highly *paidic* title, has done very well

critically and commercially, though few other commercial titles have explored the market demand for *paidia*.

According to Game Designer Raph Koster's understanding, "*Paidia* just means 'very big rulesets.'" The implication of this is any *paidic* title is going to have very high content demands and production costs. This assumption ignores the very Zen-like notion that complex results **can** result from simple rules, and the best *paidic* play is fostered by the confluence of a few robust mechanics. In *Façade*'s case, these mechanics are the two characters and the drama management AI, which mediates the player input. From these, a very real - if constrained - freedom results. In their bold attempt to support *paidia* in a dramatic context, Mateas and Stern have moved away from the discipline of game designers and toward the discipline of interactive storytellers.

True, there is much complexity in each of *Façade*'s primary objects, but this necessary complexity is encapsulated in the ideas of Grace, Trip and you. The

In games, hell is the uncertainty that the given play loop you're riding will result in an interesting reward, or whether it will continue to throw you into Sisyphus-like frustration.

introduction of the third party is essential here; it is the spark that ignites the play space. Were the play just you and Trip talking, the game would be relatively boring, and the constraints of the AI would become quickly noticeable, as the player's frame of reference casually bounded outside the magic circle. Were there no you, the interactivity would not exist.

With the introduction of the third party, the system dynamics enter a realm referred to by the often-abused term "emergent behavior." In astrophysics, two celestial bodies will circle each other in predictable patterns, but a third celestial body increases the complexity of interlocking motions, the three parties of *Façade's* drama create a relationship to focus on, constraining the frame of reference and, paradoxically, increasing the room for play within that constrained context. This rule of three is not a coincidence, Sartre's take on hell as a self-perpetuating cell of social suffering depends on the third party to continually interrupt any stable two-

person orbit. Hence the phrase: hell isn't another person, hell is other **people**.

In Sartre's play, hell is an algorithm of social interaction that perpetuates mutual suffering by the confluence of three different people. In games, hell is the uncertainty that the given play loop you're riding will result in an interesting reward, or whether it will continue to throw you into Sisyphus-like frustration. A player of *Façade* can feel, by the intuitive virtue of the *paidic* mechanics, after enough play through, a resolution will come to Grace and Trip's existential gripes and save their marriage. When that moment comes, the player is graciously and thankfully shown the door.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to get the hell out of here. [COMMENTS](#)

Patrick Dugan is a ludosophist. He runs King Lud IC, a blog regarding game design theory, memetics and interactive storytelling. He looks forward to prototyping with Chris Crawford's Storytron, and to pioneering socially-oriented narrative challenge.

History Through Games

by Dana Massey

Books seem to have become a thing of the past. As a society, we have become more reliant on the internet, television and movies to bring us information, entertainment and to pass time. Over the last few years, videogames have weaseled their way into the same breath as other major entertainment mediums. Like the others, games span times, settings and themes of all varieties. One thing games have not done, though, is alter humanity's fascination with its past.

Historical games – or perhaps I should say games set in the past – are among the most popular. In the last year, we

saw blockbusters like *Civilization IV*, *Call of Duty 2* and *Brothers in Arms*. This fascination also played out on TV, where HBO's *Rome* fascinated us. At the box-office, people lined up to see new films like *Munich* and *Good Night and Good Luck*. While history finds a frequent home in modern entertainment, and games grab more and more of society's attention, do those who develop games bear some responsibility to educate consumers on their past?

Personally, I studied History in university, but it was not until I actually traveled to the one of the places I studied – in this

case, the volcanically preserved city of Pompeii – that the significance of it all sunk in. In Pompeii, I was able to walk around a true Roman city, perfectly preserved in a single snapshot of Roman life some 2,000 years ago. Sound familiar? Videogame technology offers exactly the same opportunity and more. We know, roughly, what most major historical cities looked like, and could – admittedly painstakingly – recreate them in 3-D. It would be a mammoth project, but it would also offer people the chance to explore their past as realistically as we can hope to allow, short of time-travel. Unfortunately, this plan sounds

more like a graduate project than a money-making enterprise.

And let's be honest; the primary function of a videogame is to make money. Any studio that seeks to make a product they feel will not make money, but serve some higher ideal, best be a cooperative or charitable foundation. Otherwise, it's not fair to the people whose livelihoods depend on the success or failure of the product. Unless there is a market for purely educational history games – which I don't believe there is, at least among the mainstream of gamers – fun is the number one priority.



However, that doesn't mean developers can simply change whatever they want about history. With every major "period-piece" Hollywood released, there is inevitably a team of historians complaining about the alteration of fact in the name of drama. For example, I wouldn't be shocked if most people believed the Roman Emperor Commodus – played brilliantly by Joaquin Phoenix in *Gladiator* – is either a fictional construct like most of the rest of the film, or truly an accurate depiction of the man himself. Commodus was by no means a good emperor and he truly was killed by a gladiator, but the similarities between fact and fantasy end there. At times like that, some complain and some are undisturbed, but of far more concern is some never stop to question it.

Accuracy is one key that maintains the suspension of disbelief in an audience. Hollywood learned this and now routinely hires historians to ensure that their picture is as authentic as the integrity of the tale will allow. The game industry has largely not yet made that leap. A careful blend of actual history and a compelling game set in the past makes for a fierce combination. But some videogames have done this.

...that doesn't mean developers can simply change whatever they want about history.

Battlefield 1942 is a good example. It is arcadey, but the weapons they use – at least until the *Secret Weapons* expansion – were really used on the battlefields of WWII. The maps, while scaled down dramatically, do bear a great resemblance to real WWII battlefields. The game is fun, and people play it for fun, but at the same time – whether they realize it or not – they've also learned a little bit about their past. *Call of Duty 2* again drew on actual historical WWII accounts and made a very fun game. *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30* takes it a step further. Like the cult-hit television series *Band of Brothers*, it is based on the actual exploits of the 101st Airborne. UbiSoft produced a blockbuster WWII fighting game and dared to promote it as "one of the World's Most Authentic World War II Videogames." Unfortunately, it seems, right now, the only area where we see some thought given to history is in the WWII shooter crowd.





Perhaps this hails a sad trend - it seems as if history is being lost. I've talked to high-school students who didn't know what a Nazi was. Rome is a foreign concept to too many people. It is the responsibility of society as a whole to make sure future generations, not just stuffy historians at the local college, remember the past. Yet, doing so requires they want to learn, and that is why I look to the entertainment industry to pass along this knowledge to the masses.

So far, games are extremely behind the other major mediums in relating history. In television, we routinely see period-piece dramas, documentaries and even

...it seems as if history is being lost.

have The History Channel. In movies, bio-pics are all the rage, and we can look to smash hits like *Braveheart*, blending fact and fiction, and credit them with at least getting people interested. Besides WWII, it just does not seem games have held up their end of the bargain, which is a shame, as games are the medium best equipped to do it.

I challenge developers to consider the past when they create their next project. Our society has been dreaming of time-travel for centuries. Videogames offer us the best opportunity to metaphysically explore that past. In books, TV and movies, we're taken there, but through the eyes of others. In a game, the eyes of the character - if done well - are your eyes. You cannot lose sight of the main focus of a game: fun. However, I am not so jaded to believe people do not want to learn and explore their past if they can have fun doing it. As games grab more of our society's attention, they take it away from areas that had previously preserved history in the minds of the average person. In doing so, game developers take on part of the responsibility, and not only give a generally accurate portrayal of the past, but also make sure people can learn a thing or two from their game.

[COMMENTS](#)

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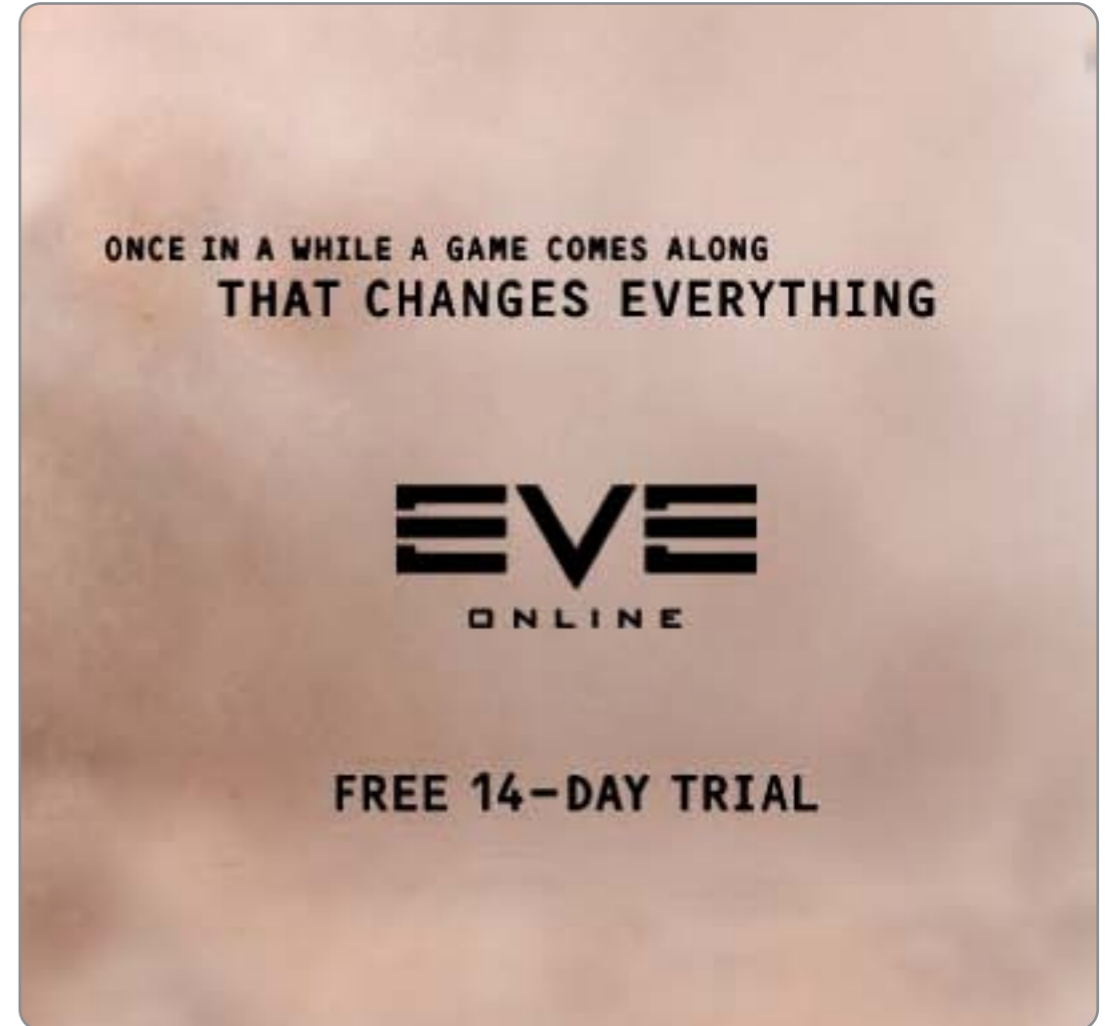
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Making the SACRIFICE

by Khurram K. Ahmed

An approach to God in videogames cannot begin directly from either God or videogames. The complexity in the argument requires us to take a step back. Without delving into a specific god or religion, we will examine how the general ideas of religious theory and spirituality, as well as godliness and godlessness, are explored, espoused and suppressed in videogames.

The manifestation of religious theory in videogames is much more commonplace than religion itself. The particular notion in mind is the scapegoat theory, which occurs in virtually every piece of art. We are, in fact, surrounded by it in our literature, film, society and politics. So much so, psychologists propagate it as their theory, and anthropologists as theirs.

While every religion draws on scapegoat theory, the most well-known example occurs in the *Bible's* New Testament. Three of the four Gospels retell the happenings when Jesus lands in Gerasene, across the Sea of Galilee. Here, Jesus performs the miracle of exorcizing the village demoniac of the demon, Legion. The Gospels of Mark (5:1-20) and Luke (8:26-39) offer the greatest detail.

The idea of a single victim being able to shoulder all the blame and malcontent in a system gives every other individual in the system a sense of safety and security. A society with a scapegoat will try its best to preserve it. The Gerasene demoniac was chastised, fettered and marginalized before Jesus arrived, but never killed. The scapegoat represents a **single** solution to all problems. So long as the status quo is upheld, the society's balance will be maintained. This is precisely why the Gerasenes were upset and demanded that Jesus leave after he healed the demoniac.

In any society, the scapegoat is not singly responsible for all wrong with the world, but he is made to take on all the blame. To this end, he is a victim. The chief antagonist in a game is not the root of all evil, or even all disorder. Hundreds of problems plague a society, from disease to famine and drought to sudden climate shift and of course, the disappearance of mana. No single entity is ever the agent that causes all the pain and suffering in every part of the game world, but invariably, a single entity is made to shoulder all the blame. Very often, a scapegoat narrative involves a vague darkness overwhelming a quiet

and peaceful land. The archvillain is never the master of all the negativity that the dark forces bring. Too often, we see game worlds shrouded in evil invite minor antagonists, like bandits and mercenaries, with no affiliation to the single nemesis who personifies and epitomizes evil. Whether the hero engages the minor antagonists or not remains a matter of a gamer's preference, but the dissolution of the scapegoat will resolve and redress the smallest and most tangential act of evil operating anywhere in the universe.

In literature, the Ring of Power in *The Lord of the Rings* holds the essence of Sauron, and so its destruction guarantees the end of its master. The end of Sauron immediately resolves all the evil in Middle-earth. He is the scapegoat. Middle-earth was on the brink of ruin and nothing was going right, but the single act of killing Sauron fixes everything. Convenient.

Tolkien's work might seem overly simplified in light of this theory, but like I said, scapegoat theory is everywhere. Samus destroying Mother Brain in *Metroid* has the same effect. In fact, this

example is more powerful because Mother Brain's death triggers a self-destruct mechanism across the entire planet. Mother Brain is the perfect scapegoat. Her death causes the destruction of every sign of her existence. Bowser serves the same purpose when his armies invade the Mushroom Kingdom. No matter how many Koopa Troopas are downed, the world is in disarray until Bowser is defeated.

Legend and game designer Shigeru Miyamoto voiced this truth when he said Link is born to oppose the rise of every Ganondorf. Link appears whenever Hyrule needs him; the deeper implication is Link needs Ganondorf. Each episode of *The Legend of Zelda's* fiction remains far from completion, even after the final dungeon, so long as the duel against Ganondorf remains pending.

The scapegoat represents a single solution to all the troubles afflicting an entire universe. In any game, beating a single level or boss never comes close to the single swift act of removing the archvillain. So, Sonic has Dr. Robotnik; Megaman has Dr. Wily; Ryu has M.



The single act of killing
Sauron fixes everything.
Convenient.

When “gameplay” devolves into something resembling a Sunday school catechism, not much gaming happens.



Bison; and Earthworm Jim has The Evil Queen Pulsating, Bloated, Festering, Sweaty, Pus-Filled, Malformed, Slug-For-A-Butt ... Each malevolent boss becomes a victim raised to power through the same recycled rituals and then sacrificed for the sake of a balanced universe.

The list might well be endless. Every hero goes on a journey to exorcise demons, and like Jesus when he performs any other miracle, he is celebrated. In videogames, the death of the archvillain returns the game’s universe to a Utopia. Religion is directly avoided in videogames, even though its influence is obvious.

Apart from this virtually universal element, religion and videogames rarely collide. The obvious, though still uncommon, exception is Bible games, which tend to play more like video *Jeopardy!* than traditional videogames. Crave Entertainment’s aptly-titled *The Bible Game*, now available for multiple platforms, is the most recent entry with this goal. But when “gameplay” devolves into something resembling a Sunday school catechism, not much **gaming** happens.

Whereas *The Bible Game* might be considered a God game, a larger genre

that draws more mainstream attention is the **god** game. We move from pseudo-game to pseudo-mythology. These titles, which range from *Populous* to *Black & White* to *Doshin the Giant*, serve as group life managers. An entire village or society is at your mercy, and the decisions regarding who should prosper and who should suffer are solely yours. These games are pseudo-mythologies because the narrative, as you play it out, becomes the mythology. No pre-existing story guides the empowered player on how to act. A village’s erection of monuments for the player-deity is a flimsy game mechanic serving as a novelty doing nothing to enhance the mythos or the gameplay. The shrines represent a token nod to spirituality, and the self-aggrandizement in the context means little. Despite the very name of the genre, the god-ness of a player is never fleshed out.

Another interesting aspect of god games is they consistently offer the player-deity rule over primitive village people. Is this to suggest that the fiction the game world tries to create would not survive in a contemporary setting? Is the modern player too arrogant and narcissistic to believe a god game could function in her city? If *Project Gotham Racing 3* can

create a sense of immersion and attachment to its world by recreating present-day Los Angeles, why can't *Black & White 3*?

Doing so would invite present-day religious iconography. Lionhead Studios wants the player to think of a god (or God Himself) without the difficulties and complexities associated with religion. For the same reason *PGR3* avoids depicting churches, mosques and synagogues, *Populous* follows suit. Despite the obvious place temples and cathedrals would have in a god game, they are ignored. They are removed from the context by unerringly giving the player control over gangs of hunters and gatherers.

As we move from games promising group life management to those advertising group and individual life simulations, we can move from pseudo-mythology to "no mythology." Titles like *SimCity*, *The Sims* and *Second Life* all try to create a complete life within a modernized, closed system. And still, they all deny the presence of religion, religion iconography and places of worship. The seminal *SimCity*, for example, asserts that a society can

function fully without any place of worship. As mayor, the player makes decisions regarding airports, sea ports, hospitals, fire departments, police stations, post offices and residential areas, but is not allowed to consider building a church.

The same philosophy pervades the other games mentioned. EA's overwhelmingly popular *The Sims* and Linden Labs' burgeoning *Second Life* both promise a complete virtual existence for your digital avatar. You can earn money, do chores and engage in intercourse. These are, to a large extent, the goals of the game. You cannot, however, visit or attend a place of worship. No avatar is so distinctly Hindu that a *Bindi* is visible on its forehead, and none is so distinctly an Orthodox Jew to permit preserved forelocks. Both games bear a message for the player, arguing a virtual life is best enjoyed bereft of spirituality. Even a game like *GTA: San Andreas*, lauded for its huge and complete living, breathing game world lacks places of worship, but is replete with dialog repeating the words "God-damn!"

Among the games trying to outline even a crude belief system (the one that

If *Project Gotham Racing 3* can create a sense of immersion and attachment to its world by recreating present day Los Angeles, why can't *Black & White 3*?



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Killer7 crosses every line regarding the sacred and sanctimonious.

usually explains the creation of the world), most create some derivative simple mythology to service its game world. *The Legend of Zelda* and *Final Fantasy* both employ these tactics. A host of other games will mention a group of all-powerful gods that either abandoned the Earth, or were locked away by some malevolent force. This lackadaisical consideration of a world mythology is trite and hackneyed.

Religion is specifically avoided in such titles, despite the layers of complexity it could unravel, because it would compromise the integrity of the organic world the designers intended. Religion and spirituality among players - be they religious, sacrilegious or passionately irreligious - remain higher on the hierarchy than any other aspect of our humanity, like economics, politics, race and nationalism. Religion must offer a more intimate relationship and experience. As such, it is unspeakable. The word "God" becomes taboo, but "god" is somehow still acceptable.

Occasionally, we see titles embracing real mythologies as functions in the game world (like *God of War*) as well as titles choosing to say very little

concerning the obvious spirituality of its universe (like *Shadow of the Colossus*). The former places many characters and settings from Greek mythology in its engine not only to carve a narrative, which employs significant borrowing from Greek legend, but also tries to enhance the gameplay with representative opponents, weapons and puzzles. On the other hand, *Shadow of the Colossus* offers an invisible mythology with minimal information regarding the circumstances of its world. Each of the colossi is clearly immense, powerful and unique - the three most important characteristics of a deity, but beyond that obvious interpretation, we are given little insight. Both these approaches rule out traditional religious iconography, while maintaining a sense of sacredness and sanctity toward the game elements.

There are a handful of games that accomplish what *God of War* does. That is, employ its mythology to not only influence, but also enhance all the aspects of the game. Games with developed mythologies engineered for a specific videogame, however, are more significant to this discourse. Although these cases are rare, it is interesting to

see they are realized in many different genres. Take, for example, *Tales of Symphonia*, *Killer7* and *Katamari Damacy*.

ToS is an RPG that creates a believable mythology. It recounts the journey a group takes to regenerate a dying world, and involves thick symbolism of scapegoats, rituals, prayers, angels, demons and an all-powerful goddess, Martel. The game's design presents frequent priests, priestesses, temples and altars, and the characters often utter prayers in their exclamations. These nuances fill out the mythology in ways ignored by most other games.

Killer7 crosses every line regarding the sacred and sanctimonious. Every icon, image, figure and name is subverted. Every angelic figure the game presents must have its wings shot off by the player. And yet, the player still manages to serve as a hero in the game world. This is clearly an extreme realization of vigilantism and extra-judicial violence, which consistently acknowledges the redemptive powers of faith and spirituality moments before abandoning them for the game's prescribed brand of justice and resolution. Coincidentally, the



last time a game tried to accomplish a similar task, the result was Shiny Entertainment's *Messiah*, an abject failure, commercially and critically. Even in hindsight, I doubt anyone would argue it proved to be avant-garde. Subverting the bifurcation of not just good and evil, but ethical and unethical, moral and immoral is not, in and of itself, provocative.

Katamari Damacy develops a mythology of an irresponsible King of All Cosmos and the player-controlled Prince. The idea that a katamari will cling to anything smaller than itself provides an awareness of perspective not realized since the 1977 short science film *Powers of Ten*. Being forced into motion at the command of a higher being, even the great Prince of All Cosmos is left to literally roll to and fro over the Earth with no greater objective than to grow before disappearing into the stars. The existential ennui suggested in the premise sounds remarkably like the desperation that left Schopenhauer bewildered some 150 years ago.

Having looked at the practicality of religion in videogames, we are left to consider the possibility of religion in videogaming. Religion has revealed itself

to be a touchy subject for game designers, but remains a topic of active discourse among players. While faith-based games are niche products, numbers of gamers of faith are growing and looking for titles that – at the very least – do nothing to espouse philosophies contrary to their own. The internet has provided an outlet for purposes of such enlightenment.

Groups of gamers with single religious and spiritual inclinations advise each other on the appropriateness, and by extension wholesomeness, of games' plots, themes and characterizations. A game like *Killer7* might score an enviable 80% for its gameplay component, adjudged based on graphics, sound and control, but manage a meager 20% for its appropriateness review, which considers its graphic and gratuitous violence and sexual themes, thus yielding an overall score of 50%.

The use of such a review system begs more questions of what the player hopes to get out of his gaming. When a gamer feels his or her sensitivities being questioned, the wholesomeness of the playing experience is undermined. The entertainment value of the game is not


subverted (as shocking as some of the violence in *Resident Evil 4* may be, it's still damn fun), but the value of the entertainment becomes diminished. The player will not want to play around children, for example. If the appropriateness of the software based on the criteria outlined by a religious lifestyle remains a major determinant of its playability, an impasse is inevitable. Given the increasing popularity of Mature-rated games, and the aging demographics of the hobbyists, it seems that both sides of the equation will lose. The conscientious player will begin to suffer through his pastime, enduring it as a guilty pleasure. If the disturbing themes continue to escalate and frustrate the player, the sense of remorse will swell to overcome the player's attitude toward the hobby and the industry supporting it, and not just a few titles. I believe this question of wholesomeness will come to the fore over the next decade once we all agree videogames are art.

Games incorporate religion to varying degrees, under varying circumstances, to varying success. If we were to

imagine gaming imbued with religion in every conceivable way, the results would be jarring. Consider id's *Doom* series. How would you react to the games if the designers had further enhanced the idea of fighting through Christian Hell with Christian iconography? That would, after all, make more sense. What if the imps and demons were fought with holy water and crucifixes, instead of a space marine's standard issue handgun and the BFG9000. What if you were required to pick up the Old Testament's 39 books for an Easter egg hunt?

Not to parody *Doom*, or make you laugh, but the image conjured is compellingly absurd. Our human mythoi are beginning to converge in videogames. The scapegoat in any game with a boss hearkens to its religious roots. But new methods of blending religion and spirituality are clearly being forged. The examples of recent successes cannot be ignored. [COMMENTS](#)

Khurram is pursuing his MA in English at home in Kingston, Jamaica and holds a long-term goal of developing a working framework for videogame criticism.



What if you
were required
to pick up the
Old Testament's
39 books for an
Easter egg hunt?

STRIDING THE Wasteland

by Shannon Drake



It made sense, initially. There wasn't the memory - or the budgets - for much narrative beyond, "You are the ultimate good guy fighting the ultimate bad guy. Now please enjoy 20 levels of platforms and jumping puzzles." However, as the games industry evolved, chasing the graphical rainbow, its ethics remain firmly rooted in an adolescent nihilism, a depressing action movie world where **only one man can stop him**, and everyone else is an unthinking automaton your avatar can use and abuse as it amuses him.

Consider the average game protagonist; when he's not a lovingly rendered stand-in for the artist's fantasies, he's a misunderstood superman with world-changing power. Alternately, there's the torn teenager with daddy issues lugging around an oversized sword. While most game heroes might be 35-year-old men with muscles big enough to crush walnuts, from a philosophical standpoint, they're black-clad teenagers flipping ostentatiously through a copy of *The Fountainhead*, hoping someone asks them about it. A protagonist's good qualities usually come down to: "Can carry approximately 140

different types of high-powered machine gun without breaking a sweat."

This hero strides a wasteland, a strange world where a teenager or a government commando is the only person with a brain or willpower, and where the entire world is against him. Parents are lovable oafs urging you to put on a sweater before you go off to fight evil, kidnapping-prone plot devices, or dead. The dead parent is the way you make an RPG deep, unless you're going to pull a "Luke, I am your father," before he takes on his ultimate giant lizard form for the thrilling finale. Governments either conspire against you (*Deus Ex*, *Half-Life*), are outright tools of evil manipulated by the evil bad guy (*Final Fantasy IV*), or they're paralyzed, distant and/or useless, as is the case with every small town plagued by monsters that's forced to hire a ragtag band of wandering mercenaries to clean up the spooky old cave outside town.

Hoping for help from your passel of friends and sidekicks? Of course, they're useless, caught strafing into a wall or needing more micromanagement than a 3-year-old, and that's assuming they aren't planning to

betray you or sell you out to the bad guys. Be it Kain's constant betrayals in *Final Fantasy IV* or the Marines in *Halo*, sidekicks are somewhere between outright sellouts and useless cannon fodder. I felt no compunction about gunning down my fellow Marines in *Halo* and taking their ammo. Why should I? All their cohorts did was make remarks about my sanity. It's not like they were going to desert, and even if they did, I'd just gun them down and take their ammo. I didn't face the prospect of an in-game fragging, the way a crazy officer in the real world might.

Turning to religion is equally futile. When the gods aren't non-existent - and they usually are - they're working against you, as in *God of War* or even *Kid Icarus*. Maybe the church can provide you some solace in these dark times? Well, that's assuming it's not literally full of evil, as in *Diablo* Mark One, or figuratively conspiring to do evil to you, as in *Final Fantasy Tactics*. Maybe they'll help you get back on your feet with a resurrection, but odds are, they will charge handsomely for it. Spiritual release is likely to be in the form of God ditching you for your behavior, as in the

finale of *Messiah*, rather than anything comforting.

In the game hero's world, ethics may exist, but only in the most dubious of ways. Perhaps there's an alignment system cribbed from *D&D*, but a geek-wide embrace of black trenchcoats and Darth Vader means the Dark Side is usually fun, and sometimes the better way to go. Even if it's a wholesale copying of the Lawful Good-Chaotic Evil system, the truest of the Lawful Good paladins are prone to careening around killing random monsters in the same manner, sometimes right beside, the most Chaotic of evil rogues.

Ethical character decisions are made mainly on the basis of what powers you get by picking good versus evil, rather than anything that speaks to the spirit. Can we wallow in the abyss for many years and really say it hasn't affected us with a straight face? Yes, games allow us to vent our spleen as vilely as we might choose, but an essential part of catharsis is the renewal of the appreciation for life, which most games lack. They encourage the wallowing, but the ending's more likely to be a setup for a sequel than

I felt no compunction about gunning down my fellow Marines in Halo and taking their ammo. Why should I?



Likable protagonists are out there, but there have been hundreds more faceless protagonists fresh out of Cookie Cutter Hero School.



anything emotionally affecting or enlightening.

Even the heroes themselves are seldom likable. Either they're pneumatic, buffed and pumped, and brainless connoisseurs of mindless explosions or they're regular-Joe types designed to appeal to people beyond the buff-guy-with-guns crowd. As a quick exercise, name the last five videogame protagonists you'd want to hang out with. Personally, I came up with three.

They're usually cardboard cutouts, designed to let you project your own desires and personality onto them (though the more cynical among us may say it's because nobody wants to pay writers), rather than having a life and personality of their own. Likable protagonists are out there, but there have been hundreds more faceless protagonists fresh out of Cookie Cutter Hero School, mowing down enemies because designers needed a stand-in for the player. Antiheroes have their place, but we barely have the well-developed good guys against whom to cast them. Noir means nothing when everything is

noir. *Sin City* is tame and boring fare when everything is gritty tales of antiheroes struggling against a dark world.

This lament is as old as the industry itself, but the time has come for the industry to grow up. Hewing to an adolescent ethos of "me against the world" is damaging to the industry as a whole, and it restricts the possibilities inherent in the sheer power of modern gaming. Technicolor is out there, but we like the black and white of our storytelling, and besides, the man's keeping me down. It's why outsiders seldom take it seriously from a storytelling, artistic and philosophical perspective, for the same reason that no one takes 14-year-old "f--- the world" door-slam theatrics seriously. If we can make world-class boob jiggle physics, someone out there can write a compelling, interesting good guy who's as interesting as the bad guys we know and love. [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.

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:

“Put a Phantom console in a box free from interference from the outside world. Does it really exist?”

**Patrick Dugan,
“An Exit”**

We are all insane, and the purest delusion is the belief that we exist. Wait ... what's a Phantom?

**Pat Miller,
“Metal Gear Pacifist”**

As a philosophy major I am compelled to say: There is no guarantee that anything in this world exists besides me.

As a starving student I am compelled to say: There is no guarantee that I will

continue to exist if remaining in solipsism means remaining unemployed.

**Dana Massey,
“History through Games”**

If someone manages to get it into a box that is cut off from the outside world, can we leave it there?

**Shannon Drake,
“Striding the Wasteland”**

Sure. You can keep vapor in a box. But eventually it becomes that icky water that runs down your mirror.

**Khurram Ahmed,
“Making the Sacrifice”**

The outside world that the Phantom could exist in would be one without Nintendo, Sony or Microsoft. And really ... can you imagine any games worth playing in such a world?

**Joe Blancato,
Contributing Editor**

I actually experienced this at CES 2005. I was scheduled to meet with the Phantom team for an interview, but the booth number they gave me led me to a circular structure with no windows or perceivable doors.

**JR Sutich,
Contributing Editor**

No console system truly exists until I can play either a *Star Wars* or *Shadowrun* RPG on it.

**Julianne Greer,
Executive Editor**

You can remove the Phantom from immediate presence, but the Idea of the Phantom is eternal and immutable; the idea of a thing is more real than the thing itself.

